

# CLOSET-PRAYER

A

CHRISTIAN DUTY:

OR, A

# TREATISE

UPON MATTH. vi. 6.

Tending to prove, that the Worship of God in Secret is the indispensable Duty of all Christians; both by fundry Examples and Arguments.

TOGETHER

With a severe Rebuke of Christians for their neglect of, or Negligence in, the Duty of CLOSET-PRAYER: and many Directions for the managing thereof, Exhortations to it, Objections answered, and Cases of Conscience cleared.

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By O. HEYWOOD,

ONE OF THE EJECTED MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL.

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*But if ye will not hear it, my Soul shall weep in secret Places for your Pride; and mine Eye shall weep sore, and run down with Tears, because the Lord's Flock is carried away Captive. Jer. xiii. 17.*

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CLOSER

CHRISTIAN DUTY

OF

THE A T I S E

Upon Matthew 23

THESE THINGS HAVE I WRITTEN  
TO YOU THAT YOU MAY KNOW  
THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER  
AND THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE  
TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF  
YOUR FAITH AND CONSCIENCE  
TO GOD AND TO MEN



WITH A PREFACE  
BY THE REV. JOHN  
CALVERT, M.A.  
OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE  
CAMBRIDGE

BY O. MAYNARD

ONE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

THESE THINGS HAVE I WRITTEN  
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JOHN BROWN

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THE  
EPISTLE to the READER;

Especially to the strict and serious  
Professor of Christianity.

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CHRISTIAN READER,

THE power of godliness is much spoken of, but I am afraid very rarely to be found amongst [even] famous professors: most content themselves with external visible duties, which formalists may carry on with as much seeming zeal and applause, as sincere worshippers: a formal spirit is the disease of the present day: the beams of gospel-light have so far extracted an assent to fundamental truths, and the necessity of some practical duties, that it is a shame (in some places) not to have a form of godliness: many will be found orthodox in their judgments, and externally conformable in their practices; yet, without a principle of grace in their hearts, or the life of religion in their lives, in the day of accounts; witness the foolish virgins: thousands do finally miscarry, besides the grossly profane: some go to hell with a candle in their hands, Christ's colours in their hats, his word in their mouths, and in the habit of religion: every one is not a saint that looks like one; a painted picture makes a fair shew, but wants life: a formalist will be comely indeed, if animated with the truth of grace: but the leaven of hypocrisy spoils many good duties: this was that leaven of the Pharisees, that sowed their prayers, and rendered them distasteful to God: they made religi-

ous duties a stage to act vain glory upon; their prayers had a thick shell, and little kernel. Our Saviour would not have the saints like them. Christ's disciples must do some singular thing, more than others; their righteousness must go beyond that of the Scribes and Pharisees: sincerity is that spirit and life, that is to run through religion: else it is a body without a soul; or cloaths without the man: this is the chief drift of our Saviour's teaching, and main design of gospel commands, to render professors sincere and spiritual; approving their hearts to God in evangelical performances. I have many times bewailed the condition of those, who are very busy in externals of religion abroad, and are grossly negligent of the main essentials at home. They are like those who are propping up some remote members of their body, while their vitals are wasting in a languishing consumption: these are like a man in a fever; his face and hands burn; but his heart shakes and quivers for cold: these I may call pepper-professors; hot in the mouth, but cold at the stomach: there are thousands in the world, will run many miles to hear a sermon, will countenance the best preachers, will read the Scriptures, and good books, will pray in their families, yea, keep days of fasting and prayer with others, that yet will not set about heart-work, and flesh displeasing duties, of mortifying beloved lusts, loving, forgiving and praying for enemies;—yea, that will not set themselves solemnly to the duties of meditation, self-examination, and secret prayer: the vessel will not stir except the wind of applause blow the sails; these are like the nightingale in the wood, of which it is recorded, that she sings most sweetly, when she thinks any is near her. An hypocrite can pray best, when taken notice of by men; you will seldom see him at work (with his heart) in a closet: he is of the mind of those carnal persons, of Christ's natural kindred, John, vii. 4. who said to Christ, *If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world:* For, saith the text, ver. 5. *neither did his*

*his brethren believe in him : q. d.* Such as carry on duties, or counsel others to such undertakings, as may expose them to public view, for ostentation, declare plainly they want true grace, which makes persons Jews inwardly, *whose circumcision is of the heart, in the Spirit, whose praise is not of men, but of God, Rom. ii. 29.* The main trade of a Christian is his home-trade, as one saith, (Gurnal's Christian Armour, chap. 12. sect 3. page 304.) which is spent (in secret) betwixt God and his own soul : here he drives an unknown trade ; he is at heaven, and home again ; richly laden in his thoughts with heavenly meditations, before the world knows where he hath been.

The consideration of these things, hath engaged me to spend some thoughts concerning this great (and much neglected) duty of closet-prayer ; which when I had delivered, and several had got copies thereof, it was judged fit for the press, and some hopes conceived of its further usefulness ; I perused it again, and methodized it into this form, and communicated my thoughts (to some) concerning the publication of it. A friend gave me notice there was a book extant upon the same subject, which I enquired after, and found one of Mr. Brooks on the same text : that book I looked over, and was ready to think it would save me a labour ; but, upon second thoughts, I considered that this might fall into some hands that would not : that several men writing on the same subject may be useful, is ordinary ; that our method, and most of our matter, is different ; for I had finished mine before I saw the other, except two or three leaves in the close : besides that, the other is larger ; this a small piece, and more portable, as a pocket-book, or vade-mecum : let it be then a short appendix to that excellent piece.

I am heartily glad any of God's servants have set themselves to promote this part of practical piety ; it is an excellent design ; and I am well assured, if Christians were more in their closets with God, their own souls would thrive better, and things would suc-



ceed better abroad ; Mr. Rogers being silenced from public work, desired his hearers to spend that time they were wont to come to his lecture in, in serious prayer and meditation in their closets, and he was confident Satan would be a looser, and their souls gainers by that providence : and this I can affirm, that if persons would spend part of that time in secret prayer, they take to run abroad to sermons in, they would be better proficients : not but that hearing the word is necessary, and so is this ; nor must the one juggle out the other : yea, these secret duties help us to profit by public ordinances. If dung be poured down on heaps in the field, it doth no good ; it must be spread abroad, before it make fruitful ground. The plaister heals not, except it be applied ; so the word must be spread on our hearts, by serious and secret meditation and application, or else it will never make our souls healthful and fruitful ; and then we must pray over it, for the showers of divine grace to wash it, and work it into our hearts : many sermons are lost, for want of souls taking them home to their closets, and turning them to prayer : I fear all will be little enough, that ministers can preach or write upon this theme ; I doubt still, this work will be either totally neglected, or negligently performed : it is an hard work ; the Spirit must travel in it ; and (saith good Mr. Bains) the saints can endure better to hear an hour, than to pray a quarter : yea, our trifling hearts will make any excuse to shift from this duty, or shuffle it off ; nay, though it be in exchange for another ; a sign the work is of God, and tending much to the soul's good, or else Satan and our corrupt hearts would never so much hinder or oppose it.

Poor soul, it may be thou lookest abroad, and seest much wickedness committed, holiness persecuted, thy God dishonoured, many things out of order ; thou wantest a capacity to bring a remedy : I must therefore say to thee, as it is reported Albertus Crantz-  
 zius said to Luther, when he began to oppose the  
 Pope,



Pope, "Brother, go into thy cell, and say, God be merciful unto me:" so say I. Alas! thy interest and influence reacheth but a little way to mend a wicked world (though thou must seek to perform as far as thy place and calling extends); but go thy way to thy God in thy closet, bewail thy sins, and the sins of others: plead with God for thine own soul: busy thyself about thyself; set all straight at home; take heed of that which the poor church complains of, Cant. i. 6. *They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.* Oh, leave other things undone, rather than this great matter, that concerns the affairs of thine own soul.

Mr. Fox tells us of one Peter Moyce, a German martyr, being called before the synod at Dornick, they began to examine him in certain articles of religion; to whom, as he was about to answer boldly and expressly to every point, they interrupting him, bid him say in two words, Yea or Nay. Then, said he, if you will not suffer me to answer for myself in things of such importance, send me to my prison again, among my toads and frogs, which will not interrupt me, while I talk with the Lord my God. Oh, Christian, the time may come, when men may stop thy mouth, and will not suffer thee to witness a good confession; withdraw thyself from men, and retire unto thy God, who will make thee freely welcome to pour out thy soul to him in secret: he will never stop thy mouth, nor stop his ear: he bids thee, *Open thy mouth wide*, Psal. lxxxvi. 10. And he tells thee, *His ear is open to thy cry*, Psal. xxxiv. 15. Thou canst not ask such great things as he can and will give: only see thou beest a child of God. Naturalists tell of a precious stone of an excellent virtue, yet looseth all its efficacy when it is put into a dead man's mouth: so prayer, in the lips of a saint, or a righteous man, availeth much; but the prayer of the wicked is not only ineffectual, but abominable to God: see to your state, and then see that you pray aright, for manner, matter, end: many ask,  
and

and receive not, because they ask amiss: above all, soul, in thy secret addressees to God, take heed of a trifling spirit; thou wilt find most ado with thyself herein: our wanton spirits are loth to be pent up into a narrow room of a spiritual performance; we love to take our liberty, in ranging abroad to a thousand objects: but, Christian, as thou lovest thy peace, thy soul, thy God, look to thy spirit in secret prayer: do not trifle away thy time upon thy knees; let not thy words freeze, as they come from thee; let no discouragements beat thee off. The woman of Canaan, as one saith, takes the bullets that Christ shot at her, and, with an humble boldness of faith, sends them back again in prayer; which indeed reached his heart, and prevailed with God for mercy.

But I shall enlarge no more at present, but refer thee to this small Treatise, wherewith I have, according to my poor talent, laid before thee this great duty: what effect it shall have I know not; my God knows, in whose hands the blessing of our endeavours lies. Get alone, and pray over this book, and for the unworthy sinful author, as he desires to do for thee, into whose hands this may come; let our prayer daily meet at the throne of grace, till our souls meet before the throne of God; if thou receivest any good by this, or any other work this poor worm hath handed to thee, ascribe nothing to the instrument, but all to the agent, and efficient, our good God, from whom comes every good and perfect gift; disdain not the work for the plainness of the stile; it was purposely put in this dress for the vulgar's benefit; and if it or myself be exposed to censure for that, it is welcome. I write not to please learned scholars, but to profit plain Christians; whose spiritual good I prefer above any credit to myself. I am sure there is none due; there being few of my brethren but they transcend me in parts and learning; *but by the grace of God I am what I am,* 1 Cor. xv. 10. Nor is that grace altogether in vain:  
for

for as it hath helped me in my labours, so he hath in some measure blessed my labours, though I be nothing, the least of saints, not meet to be called a minister. Did those that read my labours know me, they would be ready to despise my undertakings; this I speak, because my former book hath found such good acceptance, and this is so much desired; and that no man think of me above what he knoweth to be in me. My heart hath been near fainting, through discouragements, from my great weakness, had I not been supported many a time with that word in 2 Cor. iv. 7. *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man.* Whence I gather, that God can make use of weak, unlearned, sinful instruments, to do great works; and he can use persons of mean abilities, to accomplish his glorious ends, in converting souls, as well as the profoundest clerks, or wisest men on earth: yea, sometimes he layeth aside these, and rather useth the former, that all the glory might be his; *and that no flesh might glory in his presence,* 1 Cor. i. 29. But such as I am or have, is all devoted to the honour of our Redeemer, and welfare of souls,

Whiles I am,

October 31,  
1668.

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

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MATTH. vi. 6.

*But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet;  
and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy  
Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which  
seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*

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C H A P. I.      S E C T. I.

*The Context cleared.*

**I**N this excellent sermon of our precious Saviour in the Mount, we have both the gospel clearly propounded, and the law solidly expounded. The corrupt and carnal Pharisees had degraded God's holy law from its spiritual extent and regiment, by their low and literal glosses; but our Saviour restores it to its dignity and authority over hearts and consciences.

In this chapter, the best preacher that ever opened his mouth, doth admirably explain the adjuncts, offices, and exercises of true piety: which are principally three, alms, prayer, and fasting, to ver. 19.

Particularly, concerning the duty of prayer, there were two material destructive faults which the Scribes and Pharisees were guilty of, in that sweet and solemn ordinance; those were, 1. Hypocrisy; 2. Battology, or vain-babbling. Jesus Christ rebukes and rectifies both.

1. They were wont to perform their private devotions in public places, meerly for vain-glory, to be seen of men, as in the synagogues, or in the streets, ver. 5. Now for the disciples practice in this case, he commands them to withdraw themselves out of the view of men, into some solitary place, and there perform that duty, where they are least exposed to the danger of ostentation, ver. 6.

2. Another fault that our Redeemer rebukes in the duty of prayer is, vain repetitions. And though he only mentions it here as the heathens fault, ver. 7. yet certainly the Scribes and Pharisees might also be guilty of it, for they are censured for their long prayers, Matth. xxiii. 14. yet upon different accounts. Here the heathens use vain repetitions, that they may move God: there the Scribes and Pharisees make long prayers that they may deceive men, and devour widows houses. This text saith, *They think they shall be heard for their much speaking*: just as Baal's priests, 1 Kings, xviii. 26. They called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal! Hear us: they leaped upon the altar, and cried aloud, and cut themselves, with knives and lancets, untill the blood gushed out upon them. No doubt, this was done to move their cruel god, or rather stupid block, to some pity and compassion: just as the  
frantic



frantic Papists do at this day, in their self-tormenting penance: but our God, who is the searcher of hearts, delights more in ardent affections, than in either extension of the voice, or multiplication of words, or excruciating afflictions of the outward man: therefore our Saviour tells us, that when we pray, we come not to inform God of any thing he is ignorant of, ver. 8. *Your Father knoweth what things you have need of before ye ask him*: but we pray that our own hearts may be affected, and that we may have the condition of acceptance: and for the rectifying of this abuse of vain-babbling in prayer, Christ propounds and presents to us an exact draught and compendious platform of prayer, in that which is commonly called, *The Lord's Prayer*: not as though men should say only those words, and no more; for then the apostles had failed in praying in other terms, but that this might be a directory for prayer. So that every thing we ask, should be reducible to some of those heads mentioned in this perfect platform: so that, as Cyprian saith, "To pray otherwise than he hath taught (either as to the manner, or substance of the matter) it is not only ignorance, but an offence;" and indeed we cannot expect to be heard except we ask, as well according to Christ's mind, as in his name. But this is not the subject I have chosen to insist upon. That which falls under our present cognizance, from this text, is, The modification of prayer, with respect to the circumstance of privacy, solitariness, or retirement.

The text holds forth the warrant for, and manner of carrying on the great work of Closet-

prayer ; a copious subject, a precious duty. In which are,

1. The Place for it, *a closet.*
2. The closeness of the place, *door shut.*
3. The object of the worship, *thy Father.*
4. The arguments to inforce thy duty ;
  1. God's omniscience, *he sees.*
  2. His munificence, *will reward.*

## S E C T II.

### *The Words opened.*

**F**OR a more distinct opening of the words, according to the parts before-mentioned, consider,

1. What is meant by a closet here. Some understand and interpret it, not literally, but mystically, making an allegory of it, as though it did import the inner recesses or motions of the heart, but though that be a truth and duty, that we must pray in the closet of the heart ; yet, I humbly conceive, that is not the proper meaning of this place : for we need not interpret this plain word in such a borrowed sense ; since multitudes of Scriptures are so express for worshipping God with the heart. Besides, that is not suitable to the scope of the place, which opposeth self-retirement to the Pharisaical modes of devotion : the word, then, is to be literally taken, and, in general, imports any secret place where a thing is laid up ; particularly, it signifies a safe place, or cupboard, to lay victuals in ; or a locked chest,

chest, wherein a treasure is usually reserved, Mat. xxiv. 26. Luke, xii. 3. or it is taken (as indeed here and oft elsewhere) for a close or secret chamber, a with-drawing-room, retiring-place, where a person is not seen nor heard, nor yet is disturbed in his devotions by any noise or commotion; a secret conclave or locked parlour, where no company is to come.

2. *Shut thy door*; this word imports yet a further degree of secrecy; *q. d.* that thou mayest make thyself to be less observed, shut up thyself in a room; let none come at thee, to disturb thee in thy conversings with God; bar the door, and make it fast; yea, let none over-hear thee in thy retired devotions. For, observe it, in true closet-prayer there should be an including of the voice as well as the body: some pray so loud in their chambers, that they may be heard in the streets; this is not properly closet-prayer, since it doth not attain the end of this retirement, which is an approving the heart only to God, and avoiding all shews and occasions of hypocrisy and vain-glory; for it is all one (as to this end) whether the body be seen, or the voice heard; only remember, this is spoken of secret prayer; for it doth not exclude public prayer in a congregation, where the body is seen, and the voice is heard: yet it doth, by a kind of synecdoche, require self-denial, singleness, and sincerity in all kind of prayer, public, private, secret; for one part or sign of uprightness in the duty is put for the whole, shutting the door, for integrity of heart in the whole management of this affair.

3. Here is the object of prayer: *pray to thy Father*; thy business is not with men, but with

God ; seek, therefore, to please and enjoy him : nor yet art thou to fetch a compass, and pray to saints and angels, but go straight to God, in the name of Christ, and be sure thou look upon him as under the sweet relation of a tender Father ; yea, *thy Father*. Oh, a sweet word, a blessed word, and such a word as we durst not have taken into our mouths ; had it not been for Christ's glorious undertaking, to purchase for us the adoption, and this gracious commission, and in the platform of prayer, the prescription ; and for God the Father's voluntary condescension. Come, then, and fear not, poor disciple of Christ, come with filial affections, and the Spirit of adoption, and thou art sure to speed : for this paternal relation imports affection, provision, condescension, and compassion. If thou wilt be a child to him, he will be a Father to thee : 2 Cor. vi. 18.

4. Here are the arguments and encouragements to this duty of secret prayer.

1. *Thy Father sees in secret*. All is one to him whether you be in a public church, or private closet ; God (whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun) sees you in the one place as well as in the other, and though men see you not, yet content yourselves with this, that God and your consciences are competent witnesses of your uprightness, with whom you have to do, and from whom you have your reward.

2. *He will reward thee openly*. There are two things in this expression. 1. They shall be rewarded. 2. They shall be openly rewarded. So that men shall say, *Verily, there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the*



*the earth*, Psal. lviii. 11. The Scribes and Pharisees do all their works to be seen of men, and of men they have that sorry reward: you do yours in the sight of God, and from him you shall receive your abundant and eternal recompence. Though men see you not, fear not, you shall be seen and accepted by him that searcheth hearts, and knoweth the mind of his Spirit: but of these, more anon.

The sum and design of the text is this, Thou, my disciple, seest the plausible practices of the hypocritical Pharisees, to gain credit and applause; they perform their private duties in public places, as markets and synagogues, that they may pass among men for eminent saints, and they are generally so esteemed; that is their reward. But thou that hast given up thy name to me, in the profession of my name, take my counsel for regulating this sweet duty of secret prayer: let none see what thou goest about; steal time from all observers, withdraw thyself into some closet, or private place; and when thou hast made all fast, do thou set thyself in the presence of God, approve thy heart to him, lay open thy bosom before him, tell him all thy grievances; and though no creature is privy to thy secret groans, yet be sure that all thy desires are before God, and thy groaning is not hid from him; and he takes notice of thy tears, and reserves them in a bottle by him, to be rewarded in a visible manner, in a seasonable time; thy labour is not in vain; thy work is with the Lord, and thy reward with thy God.

## S E C T. III.

*Doctrines raised and cleared.*

**T**H E R E are many doctrines lie couched in the words; I shall but hint them, and pitch upon one.

1. Prayer is a choice part of religion; it is a piece of natural worship, though the right ordering of it is by institution, yet it is a main part of religion. Therefore often put in Scripture for the whole service of God: *he that calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*, Rom. x. 13. A prayerless soul is graceless.

2. Prayer is a duty much abused: there is scarce any thing so much perverted and corrupted as this choice duty, by formality, hypocrisy, superstition, base and by ends, as is clear by these Pharisees, many ways, and their younger brethren, the Papists, at this day, masses dirges, invocation of saints, &c.

3. There are several sorts of prayer: both as to the kinds, modes, and circumstances. The apostle distinguisheth of supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, 1 Tim. ii. 1. There is also public-prayer, family-prayer, and closet-prayer. Now a Christian must pray with all prayer and supplication, Eph. vi. 18.

4. A Christian must do nothing for praise or applause, especially in matters of religion: it is a base prostituting the highest things of God to our beastly lusts. It is to feed an humour, and damn the soul with that which should save it. Let no Christians (as the Pharisees here) make

make prayer truckle to their credit, Phil. ii. 3.  
*Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory.*

5. There are set and stated times of prayer: this is hinted in this word, *When*, when thou prayest. A time there must be for it, though the point of time is not determined, yet a time must be set apart for the duty every day; a Christian must chuse out the fittest time for the duty, by the due use of his liberty and discretion.

6. Circumstances are of great use in all our actions: the streets are proper places to walk, talk, buy, and sell in, but not so fit for prayer: the church is a fit place for public devotion; not so for a solemn performance of the duty of secret prayer. Although mental ejaculations are fit enough in both, yet it is not convenient to kneel down, or use outward gestures of secret prayer there.

7. Closet-prayer must be with all secrecy and solitariness: in a closet, door shut: as we must not blow a trumpet when we give alms; so we must not hold out a flag when we go to wait on God in the duty of prayer: it was carnal counsel the brethren of Christ gave him: John, vii. 4. *Shew thyself to the world.* The reason is given, ver. 5. *For neither did his brethren believe in him:* a sad sign of carnality!

8. God alone is the proper object of our prayers: *Pray to thy Father.* As he is the object of our faith; so of prayer: for he alone can help, therefore he is to be sought; none else sees our state, or can satisfy souls, Isa. lxiii. 16.  *Doubtless, thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us.*

9. In

9. In all our addressees to God, we must own God as our Father; as having adopted us in Christ: because his, therefore ours: *I ascend* (says Christ) *to my Father and your Father*, John, xx. 17. Indeed, by nature, we are children of wrath; but, by grace, children of his love; so that they may say, as Isa. lxiv. 8. *But now, O Lord, thou art our Father.* Oh plead and improve this relation.

10. God is omnipresent: *thy Father, which is in secret*: the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, 1 Kings, viii. 27. He filleth all places with his immense and infinite essence: heaven is his throne; the earth is his footstool; he is excluded from no place, included in none: for he is without all limitation, dimension, or termination.

11. God is omniscient. *Thy Father which seeth in secret.* The darkest night, or secretest closet, or most hidden thought of a reserved heart, can neither hide, or be hid, from God's all-seeing eye, Heb. iv. 13. God beholds all things in heaven and on earth with one simple single act of his understanding; without composition, discourse, or representation of species.

12. Every believing prayer hath a sure reward: *He will reward thee openly*: not a good word to God, or work for God, shall be lost: *To him that soweth righteousness, shall be a sure reward*, Prov. xi. 18. And we know every right prayer is a real seed, Psal. cxxvi. 6. And it will rise in a full and plentiful crop another day.

13. The reward of secret prayer shall be opened and manifest: they have already a reward and gift in secret. Communion with God

is



is an abundant recompence. *In keeping thy commandments there is great reward*, Psal. xix. 11. But this is a reward before the reward: the other shall be in heaven, before angels and men.

14. A Christian's reward is from God: *Thy Father will reward thee*: not men. Scribes and Pharisees have their reward from men, from men they expect it: saints expect their reward from God, and God gives it them: men reward them evil for their good will, and they expect no better: if better come from men, they own it as a gratuity sent from their Father: it is a principle of religion, to know and believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, Heb. xi. 6. And as God gives a reward; so he is the reward of his saints, Gen. xv. 1. *Yea, an exceeding great reward*. It can admit of no hyperbole, it cannot have a sufficient emphasis: to enjoy God, is a reward sufficient, in and for the service of God. These doctrines would afford large discourses; but none of these are the subject I shall insist upon.

I shall raise one from the main scope of the text, which is this:

Doct. *That closet-prayer is a Christian duty.*

Secret prayer is an evangelical exercise.

Every child of God may and must perform the duty of secret prayer.

As a Christian must pray all manner of prayer, so in all places, 1 Tim. ii. 8. *I will that men pray every where*: and if every where, then in their closets: this divine incense should perfume

perfume every room, and should ascend to heaven from chambers as well as churches: any place now is fit for a divine oratory; (Psal. cix. 4. Psal. xxx. title) a saint should give himself to prayer, and dedicate his house to God; he should (as it were) consecrate every room in his house to be a place of private devotion. Abraham reared an altar to God wherever he came; so must a Christian make every place, where he can get close to the duty, a place of prayer.

Mr. Mede hath undertaken to prove from Josh. xxiv. 26. that the Jews of old, and Christians in gospel-times had their praying-places, which he thus describes: As to the Jews of old, a praying place, saith he, was a plot of ground, encompassed with a wall, or some other like mould or inclosure, and open above, much like to our courts, the use properly for prayer, as the name imports: and these were without the cities, as synagogues were within: of this (as he thinks) were those in Acts, xxi. 31. and Luke, vi. 12. where Jesus Christ is said to continue all night in the place of prayer. Nor yet do I believe or find, but that the saints had other praying-places, as in houses, and elsewhere, as occasion was offered, even in dwelling-houses, Acts, xii. 12. But as to this duty of secret prayer, it must not be so narrowly confined, but we may go to any closet or private room where our souls may meet with God: and (as one saith\*) “ We shall not fail to find  
“ that the grots and caves lie as open to the  
“ celestial influences, as the fairest and most  
“ beautiful temples.”

\* The Life of Dr. HAMMOND in a Letter, p. 201.

## S E C T. IV.

*Instances of several in Scripture that used closet-prayer.*

THE doctrine needs no explication, but confirmation: which I shall do from Scripture instances and reasons.

We have several examples of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, that used this duty of solitary or secret prayer.

1. Abraham, the friend of God, and father of the faithful, conversed much with his God alone; particularly in this duty of prayer, Gen. xviii. 22. When the men (*i. e.* the created angels that seemed men), were gone towards Sodom, *Abraham stood yet before the Lord*, or Jehovah, *i. e.* Jesus Christ, the angel of the covenant. Standing is a praying posture, therefore put for prayer; hence Abraham drew near, and pleaded with God for Sodom: that was his errand to God at that time. No doubt he had used this course frequently in other cases: hence arose that intimacy between God and Abraham: so that God talked with him, came to him; and he again discoursed familiarly with God, Gen. xv. 12. xvii. 3.

2. Isaac, the son of the promise, a very contemplative man; therefore it is said, Gen. xxiv. 26. *That Isaac went out to meditate in the field at even-tide.* The word signifies as well to pray as meditate; it is likely he did both in some solitary walk, where he conversed with his God. The Chaldee translates it by praying, but the Greek by exercising himself, *i. e.* both in me-  
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dition and prayer: and truly there is a near affinity betwixt these two sweet duties, and it is usual for a devout soul to fall out of the one into the other, in its retirements. Soliloquy in the heart helps to a colloquy with God: but here observe Isaac's oratory, which he had in the field, which he used for more privacy; there (saith Pareus) he continually poured out prayers to God, and at this time more earnestly for the happy success of his servant; a singular example of piety: a place it was every way fit for prayer, especially in solitude, where the senses are less drawn off from pious meditations: some think he was returning from his devotions; and then it is worth noting, what a speedy reward of his piety, and effect of his prayers was granted: would all young men would take the like course for a wife, they might meet seasonably with a Rebekah in mercy.

3. Jacob is a famous instance of this choice exercise, few like him; he was put to flee, but they could not drive him from his God: they had their meeting places and intercourse where none saw: particularly that remarkable time, Gen. xxxii. 24. *Jacob was left alone: and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.* It is likely Jacob had sent his household away, on purpose that he might wrestle with God alone: I shall not dispute whether Jacob had any extraordinary natural strength of body: I am sure he had abundance of spiritual strength of grace, nor shall I take notice of the Hebrews subtil disputes concerning this man. Hosea tells us, it was an angel, yet withal he tells us, *That by his strength he had power with God,* Hos.

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Hof. xii. 3, 4. Therefore this was God himself, the creating, not a created angel, even Jesus Christ, the angel that redeemed him from all evil, Gen. xlviii. 16. whom Malachi calls, the angel of the covenant, Mal. iii. 1. It was God himself, Elohim, whom Jacob overcame in this stupendous conflict. But how did he thus prevail? The text saith, *With prayers and tears he wept and made supplication*: now he had gotten God to a side (as it were), and none came to distract him, or to part this strong and blessed duel; he is resolved to stick to his hold, and not let God go, till he blessed him: and good Jacob came off a noble conqueror; and from that purchased the famous name of Israel: Oh unequal matches! Oh unparalelled conquest! The seemingly adverse combatant was Jacob's only assistant; and the conquered was the invincible Jehovah; and no other seconds or spectators, but the infinite God, and worm Jacob.

4. Moses was a choice man of God, whom the Scripture characterizeth as a non-such, Deut. xxxiv. 10. *There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face*: and this intimate acquaintance was obtained, maintained, and exercised by this secret conversing with God: how often do we find the Lord and his servant Moses together? and none with them, yea, Moses only must come near, and the rest must worship afar off, Exod. xiv. 12. And what business have these familiar friends one with another? Why, sometimes the Lord speaks to Moses, sometimes Moses speaks to God in secret prayer: see both together in

Exod. xxxii. 9, 10, 11. A strange Scripture ! God and Moses had been conversing with each other in the Mount forty days : God tells Moses, the people had made them a molten calf, and he was angry, and would consume them, and bids Moses let him alone ; as though Moses had bound the hands of Omnipotency : nay, then, thinks Moses, if my poor people be in this hazard, since I am with God, I will ply the throne of grace, and improve my interest for them : and then he falls close to the work, and besought the Lord his God ; and it is said, At this time he alone stood in the gap, and prevailed, by his intercession, to turn away God's wrath from Israel, Psal. cvi. 23. Here was a work, and this was the fruit of secret prayer.

5. David, the man after God's own heart, was a man much skilled in secret or closet meditations and prayers : hence some of his Psalms of prayer and praise, were first composed in caves, wildernesses, and solitary places, Psal. cxlii. Title is *Maschil of David ; a prayer when he was in the cave.* And this is for instruction to us, so Maschil signifies : yea, he purposely compiles the 102d Psalm, as a pattern to all that may be in his case, that is, solitary ; *As a pelican in the wilderness, an owl in the desert, or a sparrow alone upon the house-top*, ver. 6, 7. Then they are to pray as he did, and to pour out their complaint before the Lord : yea, upon a declaration of God's covenant, designs of mercy to David and his house, the good man went either into some private room in his own house, or into the tent before the ark, and there set himself, first to meditate, then to pray ;

pray; for he did both, as that Scripture clearly intimates, 2 Sam. vii. 17. 27. And oh, what memorable fruits of secret prayer had David frequently! Surely he felt the sweetness of it, both in his soul and body, in his spiritual estate, and political affairs: therefore he commends it to all, Psal. iv. *Commune with your own heart upon your bed* (or in your bed-chamber); and there also offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord, ver. 4, 5.

## S E C T. V.

*Five more Instances produced.*

6. **A**NOTHER example from Scripture of the performance of this duty of secret prayer, is the famous man of God Elijah, who wrought many miracles, and was mighty in prayer; for so the apostles James testifies of him, chap. v. 17, 18. that he could shut and open heaven; he had, as it were, got the key of the clouds, to open the windows of heaven, that it might rain or not rain, according to his word. But how came he by this power? Why, certainly he had great acquaintance with his God in secret. Take one instance what his practice was, 1 Kings, xvii. 19—24. it is the memorable history of raising the widow woman's dead son. It was a great undertaking: none but God could raise the dead, God is to be implored by earnest prayer; no place so fit for that great duty as a closet, or some close chamber, therefore he being to deal with his God, in good

hard earnest, about this important business, saith the text, *He carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed, and then he cried to the Lord*, ver. 19, 20. It was not the first time Elijah had there wrestled with God; if it was his lodging room, it was his praying room: and here God heard him, and wrought the miracle: what he did for Elijah, he can and will do for us, if he see fit: for Elijah was no more than a man, and subject to like passions as we are.

7. Jeremiah is a remarkable instance: he was a prophet of the Lord, sanctified from his mother's womb, yet he met with so many discouragements, that he hath a mind to leave his people, Jer. ix. 1, 2. and he wisheth for a lodging place in the wilderness, *i. e.* some solitary retirement, that there he might take his fill of weeping; however, he resolves at present, that wherever he is, he will get retired, and, saith he, *My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride*, Jer. xiii. 17. Yet more punctually, to the business of secret prayer, see Jer. xv. 17. saith he, *I sat alone because of thy hand*. But what did he alone? Did he only pore and muse upon the church's sins and sufferings? No, he had something to say to his God, ver. 18. *Why is my pain perpetual?* And God then hath something to say to him by way of gracious answer, ver. 19. *If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me*: this is the result of his secret prayer, a restoration of him to, and his confirmation in, his office and function, and to the public exercise thereof: this is worth praying for.



8. Daniel is a famous pattern of the resolute and courageous performance of this duty, against all opposition : although he might have pleaded (if ever any), there is a lion in the way ; I shall be slain in the streets, or den, for my work in my chamber : yet he feared nothing, he ventured upon a severe law, his prince's displeasure, the loss of his preferment, the rage of his competitors, and the lions hungry stomachs, rather than he will omit or intermit his accustomed course of chamber-worship ; he will endure the lions cruelty, rather than neglect a known duty : nay, he is so far from gratifying his proud adversaries, that he will not, in the least, abate his wonted frequency, or visibility in the duty ; *But his windows being open toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed*, Dan. vi. 10. But did Daniel hold out a flag, or blow a trumpet, by setting open his windows to declare to men what he was a going to do ? Was not this contrary to the rule in the text ? Are we here commanded to shut our door, and may Daniel open his window ? Is not that all one ? Surely that good man did not open his windows out of hypocrisy and vain-glory ; but to shew his resolution, courage, and constancy, out-daring these impious impudent commands of men : he did not fear to be seen now in so plain a case : what a spirit are they of, that will rather give themselves to the roaring lion, and incur the wrath of the King of heaven, which is more terrible than a thousand hungry lions, than solemnly perform this useful duty of secret prayer ? Let careless souls consider this.

9. Peter,

9. Peter, a famous apostle, shall be another instance in the case, Acts, ix. 40. when Tabitha or Dorcas lay dead in an upper chamber, and the widows stood weeping by her, and he was to raise her, *he put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed, and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise; and she opened her eyes.* See here another miracle like Elijah's, upon secret prayer: but this was upon an extraordinary case; did Peter use to pray alone? Yes; turn but to the next chapter, Acts, x. 9. *Peter went up upon the house-top to pray, about the sixth hour:* which was about noon, another praying season, Psal. lv. 17. certainly he missed not morning and night for such devotion: he went to the top of the flat roofed house, which was a private place, and equivalent to a closet; there Peter prayed, and in that prayer he fell into a trance, and in that trance he had a vision concerning the calling in of the Gentiles; a glorious mystery and transcendent mercy towards us poor out-casts; a mystery which was kept secret since the world began, hid from ages and generations; Rom. xvi. 25. Col. i. 26, 27. Eph. ii. 4. 6. this blessed mystery, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel: yet this transcendent design of love was manifested to a choice apostle, while he was in the performance of this duty of secret prayer: this is very remarkable, and worth observation.

10. The last instance is of our blessed Saviour; our dear Lord Jesus was very conversant in this duty: Mark, i. 35. *In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed*  
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*into a solitary place, and there prayed.* Our precious Redeemer went about doing good, and the day time he usually spent in preaching, conferring, healing diseases, &c. and the night he spent in prayer, meditation, and such other holy exercises: he had scarce time to eat or sleep for doing his Father's work; he spent not one moment of time unprofitably in above thirty years: how early doth he rise, and earnestly doth he follow his business for communion with his Father, and for the work of our redemption! Yea, Luke, vi. 12. he continued all night in prayer to God: *i. e.* in a mountain, in secret prayer, and frequently elsewhere, we shall find him alone, and in this work, Mat. xxvi. 36. and wherefore was all this? Was it not principally for our sakes? For our salvation, and imitation? Yes, certainly, he designed our good in all; he prayed that we might pray, and reap the profit of his prayers and purchases. Cyprian sweetly taught us to pray, not in words only, but deeds; himself praying frequently, and deprecating, and so demonstrating what we are to do by the witness-giving of his own example.

Most divines hold the obligatory power of Scripture examples, in things not forbidden; especially being so laudable a practice, and implied in other Scriptures, all the former instances seem cogent arguments; but the last concerning Jesus Christ, hath the force of a positive precept and command.

But there are few or none that have the face of Christians, dare deny this to be a duty; but I fear many, that would go for Christians, live in the ordinary neglect of it.

## C H A P. II.

*The Reasons to prove that Closet-Prayer is a Christian Duty.*

## S E C T. I.

*The first Reason of the Point.*

**A**LL the reasons that I shall make use of at this time, for the proof of this doctrine, and clearing secret prayer to be a duty, shall be fetched out of the text, and they are these.

1. The conveniency of privacy for prayer.
2. The relation betwixt God and a saint.
3. God's omniscience, *seeing in secret*.
4. God's munificence, *rewarding*.

1. The great conveniency there is in privacy for prayer, and the good providence of God bestowing upon us private rooms, which implicitly call us to the performance of that duty. For there is in retirement a great advantage for the managing any work of wisdom, Prov. xviii. 1. *Through desire a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom, i. e.* He that is really studious of true piety, will voluntarily sequester himself to prosecute it. This was anciently the well-meaning design of a monastic life, which since hath been wholly abused: but yet certainly there is a very great advantage in solitariness, for carrying on a religious business: take only two at present, which are advantages particularly referring to this duty of prayer, whereunto secrecy contributes.

(1.) Self-



(1.) Self-expostulations, and self-abasing gestures and expressions: when a Christian in prayer finds his heart hard, dead, dull, distracted, or any way out of order, he may in secret make a pause, and begin to commune with his own heart, examine the matter, lament the cause, chide his untoward heart, and charge his wanton spirit to keep close to his God in duty: thus David, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Awake, psaltery and harp, I myself will awake early: my soul, wait thou upon God.* Nothing more familiar int he Psalms than such intercessions and diversions from the work in hand, to raise up the heart to a higher tune in prayer and praises. And this may be of singular use; for, by such heart reasonings and debates, a saint may wind up his spirit, and get better prepared for the remaining part of the exercise: now such a work as this would not be so seasonable and convenient, when others join in the duty: so also for bodily postures; sometimes for an evidence of greater humiliation, a Christian finds it requisite to prostrate himself before the Lord: and use such gestures as would not be fit in the sight of others; therefore closet-prayer is very necessary, where a Christian may use his discretion, as God shall direct him, for the humbling, quickening, raising, and melting of his heart before the Lord alone: that is the first advantage.

(2.) It is a wonderful help against distraction. When we are (as it were) out of the noise of the world, we are then fitter for attendance upon God: the affairs, discourses, troubles, and confusions of a family (if within hearing), are a great hindrance to the duties of meditation and prayer:

prayer: experience testifies this; a man cannot study or cast accounts in a crowd or throng of people. When we are intent upon any business, how little a noise diverts us? It may be this was the reason why that hospitable gentlewoman, in 2 Kings, iv. 10. would have a chamber built for her welcome guest, the prophet Elisha, yea, built upon the wall: for she might judge him to be a contemplative man; and though she might have lodging rooms in her house, yet she might look upon that at a little distance as more commodious for his devotions and meditations, as being out of the noise of household business and hurryings: an active fancy quickly closeth with any diversion in our attendance upon God: therefore ought we to study to attend upon the Lord without distraction: when Abraham went to worship in the mount, he left his servants below in the valley, lest they should obstruct his communion with God: when Moses was to go up unto the Lord, though Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and the seventy elders went further than the people, yet the text saith, *They should worship afar off*; but, saith God, *Moses alone shall come near the Lord*, Exod. xxiv. 1, 2. Observe it, when Moses had parted with his company, and was alone, then he should come near the Lord; common professors worship not God at all acceptably, sincere saints, worshipping God with others, are comparatively far off; but souls, in a corner or closet, are admitted to come near God, and have sweet intimacy with him, as I shall shew anon. Yet, mistake me not, not as though I preferred secret prayer alone, before public

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public prayers with others; for as God delights in the joint prayers of his people, so a soul may enjoy God in communion of saints, and is ordinarily more carried out to God than in private, according to the helps and advantages he hath with others; yet, when the heart is in frame, there is usually more intimacy expressed betwixt God and the Christian in secret, than with others: yet, further, mistake not, not as though solitariness freed us from all distractions: if we take our hearts with us, we shall have a principle of diversion, and need neither noise, nor visible objects, to hinder us from God: and this, those that have magnified solitariness most, have found by sad experience, and left upon record: take an instance; Cyprian speaking of Christ's fasting, and being tempted in the wilderness, chusing that place for its secrecy, because, saith he, fastings are to be observed so as God alone may be Judge; and, in such contests as these, we are to call on God alone, as spectator and helper: and shews notably the danger of vain-glory, and advantages of secrecy; yet adds, Let not a man imagine he hath escaped all dangers, when he comes into a wilderness or solitary place: because he is invaded by the tempter, so much the more difficulty, because more subtilly, who sitting before the doors of the thoughts, seeks to strangle all the buds of virtue in their very birth. Yet the disentangled soul will more freely resist its enemy, when the fetters of impediments are wanting, and the sight discerns no allurements, and the conflict is more secure; when particular affairs pluck not back the combatant; nor the

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delights of enticing pleasures inebriate (or make drunk) the mind. This is the first reason, from the advantages of secrecy.

## S E C T. II.

*The second Reason, is, from the Relation betwixt God and a praying Soul.*

2. **A**Nother reason held forth also in the text, is drawn from that relation which is betwixt God and a believing soul: therefore our Saviour bids, pray to *thy Father*: and this reason hath two parts.

1. The poor soul can more freely open his heart to God in a closet.

2. God will more clearly manifest himself to the soul in secret.

1. A soul in secret, making its addressees to God, goes to him as a Father: now we know children cannot be so free in their addressees to their father, in company, and before strangers, as when no body is present: hence it is, that when a child hath any special business to his father, he takes him aside, or whispers to him, that none may overhear him: and observe it, God's children have an errand to God that none must know of: as Ehud said to Eglon, *I have a secret errand to thee, O king*, Judg. iii. 19. So a gracious soul may say, Oh my King, my God, my Father, *I have a secret errand to thee*: a lust to confess, or mercy to beg or bless thee for, that I would not have others to know of. It is not fit any should be privy to that which a gracious



cious soul tells God of : in this case, it may be said, *Discover not thy secret to another*, Prov. xxv. 9. Two may keep counsel, but three cannot : God and a gracious soul will be faithful to each other, but a third must not know of these matters; nay, in this case we may say, *Keep the doors of thy lips from her that lieth in thy bosom*, Micah, vii. 5. There are many things a faint tells God of, that he will not acquaint either father, or wife, or friend with, that is as his own soul, but only his heavenly Father; he opens his bosom freely to him, and tells him his whole heart, best and worst; hides nothing from him, because he only knows the heart: and truly I have often in this admired the wisdom of God, that hath so far consulted his people's credit and modesty, as to appoint them place and ways of speaking to him privately, designing secret prayer for this very end, that the soul may spread its letter of wants and complaints before its Father, and present its petition to the King of heaven. The spouse of Christ is modest (saith an ancient), and cannot so freely let out herself to her beloved, before others, as in a corner. Here then comes in the use and advantage of closet-prayer, that a Christian may (as Jonathan and David did, unbosom themselves to each other alone) open his heart to God, where no eyes see, or ears hear his secret groans and tears. But further,

2. God will more familiarly communicate himself to the soul in a corner: he also hath something to whisper in the believer's ear, that none must know of, and therefore gets it by itself: a lively emblem whereof we have in Jo-

seph's making himself known to his brethren; when his bowels were working, *and he could not refrain himself, he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. Then he wept aloud, and said, I am Joseph*, Gen. xlv. 1, 2, 3, 4. And, oh, what endeared reciprocal affections did work in all their breasts toward each other! Just thus it is betwixt our Joseph and his brethren, Jesus Christ and his members; there stands none with him, while Jesus made himself known unto his brethren: and though, at first, they be (as it were) troubled at his presence, yet, when he speaks lovingly, and passeth by former unkindnesses, and saith, *Come near unto me, I pray you*, then they come near, and he saith convincingly, *I am Jesus, whom ye sold and crucified*: this melts and humbles their rocky hearts: and being broken, he pours oil into their troubled spirits, and speaks many sweet heart-reviving words unto them: then, then the child of God hath most sweet refreshing incomes; when God hath allured the soul into the wilderness, he speaks to its heart, Hos. ii. 14. A wilderness is a solitary place, where other speech is not heard (as the word imports): then speaks God to the soul, when men cannot speak to it: when men are remote, God is near at hand; yea, nearest to help, melt, comfort, quicken, when men are furthest off: our Saviour saith of himself, John, xvi. 32. *You leave me alone, yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.* q. d. When you go away, my Father comes to visit me with most familiar endearings. Oh blessed exchange! Thus it is often with the saints: when men leave them, or they withdraw from  
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men, they have many times most of God: and, is it not infinitely better, to have the presence of God, than the company of men? It is worth noting, what God saith of Abraham, Isa. li. 2. *I called him alone, and blessed him.* Mark it, when God had inticed Abraham from all his friends, and got him alone, then he blesteth him: and you know what the blessing of Abraham was, even a covenant-blessing; such God distributes to his saints, when he hath withdrawn them from company into a corner: this is that which made an ancient profess, that a town was his prison, a solitary place his paradise: cities, or numerous societies, draw a veil betwixt God and the soul, which solitariness withdraws; and so many times becomes most sweet: we often lose God in a crowd of business or company, but find him when alone: hence a corner of our house may be a little corner of heaven; and in our closets we may find the sweetest cordials and contentment: you know, friends do most familiarly enjoy one another when others are not present. Jonathan sent away the lad when he would be familiar with his friend David: and then they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded, 1 Sam. xx. 40, 41. even so, husband and wife alone have the sweetest embraces: there lies a restraint (as it were) upon God by company, which is taken off in a sort by solitariness. Oh! when God finds a soul alone by itself, having set itself purposely to meet him, then he reveals his love, unveils his face, unlocks his blessed chest, distributes doles of love and grace, kisses it with the kisses of his mouth, and sends it not

away empty, but full of grace and peace. Thus that word of Solomon is verified, Prov. xiv. 10. *The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddles not with his joy*, i. e. No creature on ear this privy to the secret groans, or sweetest solace of a retired saint: that is the second reason.

### S E C T. III.

*The third Reason is drawn from God seeing in secret.*

**A**Nother reason is drawn from God's omniscience and omnipresence: the text saith, *Thy Father sees in secret*: and the strength and force of this argument lies in these four particulars.

1. *God sees in secret.* Therefore he takes notice whether ye pray in secret, yea or no: he looks after thee, as it were, when thou goest into such a chamber and solitary place, and saith, That soul hath now an opportunity, a convenient place and fit occasion to wait upon me; and will he not? Will he be always so busy in other company, that I must have none of his fellowship? Must his converse be so much with men, that he can spare no time for communion with God: nay, will he go so often into such a room, to do such and such a business, and can he never find a time to go down upon his knees and visit me? Hath he so much to do in the world, that he hath no leisure to look up to heaven? Do his worldly occasions still thrust out spiritual meditations? will he never set him-  
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self solemnly to transact betwixt myself and him, in prayer and meditation, the most important business of his soul? Ah, sirs, the omnipresent God takes notice of all your motions into and out of your chambers, and expects that sometimes, at least, your souls should wait upon him: and why should Christians frustrate his expectations?

2. *Good sees in secret.* Therefore he hath seen thy secret sins, and sins in secret: thy close and closet wickedness is naked and open before the piercing eye of an all-seeing God; therefore should thy closet tears and prayers testify thy sound and saving repentance. For this is a rule in practical divinity, that sorrow for sin must bear some proportion to the nature and circumstances of the sin, both as to degree, and circumstances of time and place. Manasseh humbled himself greatly for his great abominations. So, for place and manner, them that sin openly must be rebuked before all, and testify their repentance before the church, 1 Tim. v. 10. So, if the sin be private, or less known, the rule in Mat. xviii. 15, 16, is to be observed for private admonition and confession: and, consequently, secret sins must be secretly mourned for. When thy sins are known to none but God and thine own conscience, thou art not bound to discover them to any other but to God, in an hearty secret repentance, except in some few cases. Here then comes in secret prayer and godly sorrow: well, then, there is none of us without our secret sins, and God sees them all, though never so privily committed; we may hide sin from men, we cannot hide it from the Lord: he sets our  
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secret sins in the light of his countenance, Psal. xc. 8. His eyes are open upon all the ways of man; and who knows all the errors of his life? Job xxxiv. 21, 22. Jer. xxxii. 19. Prov. v. 10. Therefore must we get alone and enumerate all the sins we know of, and desire God to shew us what we do not know, and with holy David, breathe out that devout petition, Psal. xix. 12. *Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*

3. *God sees in secret*, therefore thou dost not lose thy labour; though men know not where thou art, or what thou art doing, yet thy God takes notice of thee: thou dost not thy good works *incognito*; though thy groans are not seen or heard by men, yet they are well known to thy God, Psal. xxxviii. 9. *Lord, all my desire is before thee: and my groaning is not hid from thee.* As if David should say, Lord, I many times withdraw myself into a closet or retired place, and there I open before the Lord the sorrows of my soul; *I pour out my heart like water before the face of the Lord*, Lam. ii. 19. Sometimes, in the night-watches, or in solitary places, none knows what I am doing; no eye sees, nor ear hears, my briny tears or bitter out-cries; but the all-seeing God hides not his eyes from my tears, stops not his ears to my cries, but knows my groans, yea, my very desires: observe it, there is not a believing prayer but it is upon the file, and on record in heaven, though offered up by an obscure person, and in an obscure place; yea, God knoweth the meaning of his Spirit in the hearts of his people, Rom. viii. 17. though the troubled saint cannot tell whether it be indeed the Spirit of God or no: but this know, that

that secret prayers, in a chamber, are as well known to God, as open prayers in a public church; heart-ejaculations are owned by God, as well as loudest acclamations. God took notice of Hezekiah, when he turned his face toward the wall, and wept, and prayed, and, saith God, *I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears*, Isa. xxxviii. 5. Though men did not much take notice, God did: yea, more, he expreſſeth his approbation and acceptation of these sacrifices in secret. But of that anon.

4. *God sees in secret*, therefore closet-prayer is a solemn acknowledgment of God's omniscience and omnipresence: when you pray in a corner, you testify your faith in God's ubiquity, and look upon him as filling heaven and earth; and this God commands us to believe, yea, would have us to lie under the sense hereof. Hence that vehement exhortation, Jer. xxiii. 24. *Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?* Yes, saith the believing soul, I know thou art every where; no thought can be withholden from thee; therefore I wait on thee here: all is one where I am; for wherever I am, I cannot run away from thee; and wherever I am, I may approach unto thee: and the Lord is nigh to broken hearts, and praying souls, Psal. xxxiv. 15, 17, 18. He is not far from every one of us; but his special presence is with his saints in duty. David composeth a Psalm of God's immensity, Psal. cxxxix. wherein he shews, 1. God's omniscience, in the six first verses, *Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising, &c.* 2. God's omnipresence, ver. 7. to ver.

ver. 14. *Whither shall I go from the Spirit? If to heaven, thou art there, &c. Darkneſs and light are both alike to thee:* and what uſe doth holy David make of this heavenly doctrine? Surely, if God will be with him wherever he is, he is reſolved to be with God, ver. 18. *When I awake, I am ſtill with thee,* i. e. by ſecret prayer and meditation: when I lie down, I commend my ſoul and body to thee; and when I riſe up, I meditate of thee; when I go to ſleep, I pray; when I awake, I am with God by holy and precious thoughts. So that I am ſtill with God, all my days, in all places, conditions, relations, companies, I am ſtill with my God: and, as a good man uſed to ſay, “My God and I are good company:” this, this is to be thorough paced in religion; this is Enoch’s walking with God, a converſation in heaven, a fellowſhip with the Father, an emblem of glory, and the ſweeteſt, happieſt life a ſoul is capable of in this world; and much of this conſiſts in a converſing with God in the duty of ſecret prayer: and all this flows from a due apprehenſion of God’s omniſcience and omnipreſence: and this reaſon Cyprian renders, why Jeſus Chriſt here doth preſcribe our cloſet-devotions, as moſt agreeable to our Chriſtian faith, that we may know God is every where preſent, hears all, and pierceth with the fulneſs of his majeſty into the inmoſt rooms, and hidden places, according to the Scriptures: and, truly, this is a doctrine worth confirming by ſuch a practice; and this is a practice worthy of ſuch a doctrine: that is the third reaſon.

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## S E C T. IV.

*The last Reason is drawn from God's rewarding openly.*

4 **L** Astly, the text saith, *Thy Father that seeth in secret will reward thee openly*: this reason is drawn from God's munificence. Wherein we have, 1. The promise, that is a reward: 2. The manner of performance, *openly*: this is a comfortable circumstance; it is worth something to know that our labour is not lost, it shall be rewarded, yea, it shall be rewarded by God, whose rewards are great, like himself; yea, it shall be rewarded by thy Father. A father takes in good part a little service of an obedient child, and gives a great reward for a little work; yea, closet-prayer shall be openly rewarded. The observableness of the mercy increaseth the rates of it; tending more to the Christian's comfort, example to others, encouragement to right worshippers, and glory to God: all these things might take up much time; but I shall only hint what is that open reward that God gives to such as are constant in closet-prayer; that is these four ways.

1. By returning a visible answer to secret prayer: none saw Jacob's wrestling, hand to fist, (as it were) with the angel; but all might observe the loving embraces betwixt that good man and his hostile brother Esau, Gen. xxxii. 24. with chap. xxxiii. 4. There was no witness of Moses's intercession for Israel in the mount; but all the congregation, and the whole world, may bear witness of God's hearing his prayer, for sparing an offending people, Exod. xxxii. 10,

11. 14. When Eli observed Hannah's lips move, and heard no voice, he mis-judged her to be a drunken woman: but the truth is, she was busy with her God in earnest prayer; and though he knew nothing of it then, yet afterwards he saw the effect, 1 Sam. i. 13. with ver. 27. *For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: (ecce signum)* behold a sign of his favour; behold an evident token that I prayed in truth! Many a time, yea, many a time was I provoked by my scoffing adversary, Peninnah; and as often did I make my moan to my heavenly Husband; and see here the fruit of my sincere devotions in a corner: none saw my tears; all may see my child; none heard my cries in prayer; but the voice of my Samuel shall be heard by all Israel: he shall carry the memorial of answer to secret prayer in his name to the grave: and cannot many a soul speak the same language? cannot you seal to the same or like experiment? cannot some of God's children say, This mercy I got from God in such a room, chamber, or closet? No creature upon earth knew what I did there. But now all may see the happy effects of my hard travel; I find that it is not in vain to seek God in private; none knows the meaning of the mercy but myself. I may call it Naphthali; for with great wrestlings have I wrestled with my God, and prevailed, Gen. xxxviii. 8. This mercy bears a double price to all the rest; for it is won by prayer; and now may be worn with praises and triumphing; so that a soul may say, *This is my God, I have waited for him, he will save me, this is [my God] Jehovah,*  
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*I have waited for him, I will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.* Lo, here he is; I can now make my boast of my God. Wicked men are wont to say, *Where is thy God?* Now I can answer them, Lo! this is he that returns such answer to my prayer, that appears so gloriously for me: this is my God, whom I have trusted, on whom I have called, and he hath answered; I am not disappointed: blessed be God, these appearances are the visible returns of my secret prayers.

2. God rewards secret prayer openly, by discriminating providences in a common calamity: God usually takes them into the chambers of his protection, that retired themselves into chambers of devotion, Isa. xxvi. 20. They that enjoy most of God, shall be best secured by God: Psal. xci. 1. *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty:* i. e. He that by faith and prayer hath got most intimate communion with God, is lodged in the safest shelter in the day of danger: and who is so likely to enjoy God as that Christian that waits much upon God in secret? he gets into God's secret place, who is much with God in secret places: David put up many a hearty prayer in solitary caves; and how remarkably doth God secure him in the day of apparent hazard, to the conviction of Saul and his courtiers? We find the mourners in Zion, lamenting secretly the abominations committed openly, and God sets an obvious character upon their foreheads, seen discernably by the destroying angel, and known apparently by the effects thereof to the world, in their exemption from

general stroke of desolation, Ezek. ix. 4. 6. Jeremiah's soul weeps in secret, for the pride and profaneness of Israel; and he was strangely secured in the day of Israel's dreadful destruction, Jer. xiii. 17. with chap. xxxix. 11. It is very remarkable, what is recorded in Gen. xix. 29. *God remembered Abraham; and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow*: why, what did Abraham? The former chapter tells us, that Abraham had been with God in prayer, in secret; and this was the effect of it, God will snatch Lot out of that dreadful burning, as a return of secret prayer: God takes a time to put a difference betwixt his praying people and others: faith and prayer are two feet of the soul, whereby the righteous run into the name of the Lord, which is their strong tower, and are safe, Prov. xviii. 10. A soul hid with God, cannot be hurt by men: if any be secured in a day of danger, it is those that are most with God in a corner: *Floods of great waters shall not come nigh to praying saints*, Psal. xxxii. 6. Hence, saith David, ver. 7. *Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble*: some way or other God will attest and testify the integrity of his praying servants before the world. See Psalm xxxi. 19, 20. and xci. 15. Thus he dealt in the case of Job: God's children may be long concealed from the view of men, both as to their persons and actions; but, in God's time, he brings them out with honour, as he did with Elijah: sometimes God gives clear demonstrations of his tender affection, to his despised saints, in the view of the world, Rev. iii. 9.—*I will make them to come and worship before thy feet,*

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*feet, and to know that I have loved thee*: this is not a religious adoration; but a civil reverence due to real saints, as an evidence of repentance, or special respect: as dogs fawn upon their masters, laying themselves at their feet: as the word imports. Natural conscience, sometimes, doth homage to the image of God in the saints: however, this is a well-known truth, that as God hath brought forth wicked men's secret works of darkness into open light, to their confusion in this world: so he hath clearly discovered his saints upright services, in secret corners, to their honour and safety; in the nick of time: Jaddus hearing of Alexander's approach to Jerusalem, set himself to pray; then put on his priestly garments, and met the conqueror, who fell down on his face before him. Parmenio asked him, why he adored the Jews High-Priest, when as other men adored him? Alexander answered, I do not adore him, but that God which the the High Priest worshipeth; for, in my sleep, I saw him in such an habit, when I was in Macedonia. [See Clark's general Martyrol. Fol. 5.] But examples of this nature are frequent every where; what strange effects prayer hath brought forth, both for defence to the saints, and offence to their enemies! so that the clear evidence hereof hath wrested from many stout opposers, that acknowledgement of the queen of Scots, that she feared more the prayers of John Knox, than an army of ten thousand fighting men: but this is the second branch of this last reason. God openly rewards, by manifest deliverances in time of danger.

## S E C T. V.

*The third Way of rewarding secret Prayer, is, Increase of Grace.*

3. **G**OD rewards secret prayer openly, by conferring upon secret wrestlers more eminent gifts and graces of his Spirit, and such as shall be taken notice of by others: they that are most constant in secret prayer, shall be most eminent in open prayer: such as, with Moses, converse with God in the mount, shall have shining faces: the beauty of the Lord shall be upon them: when a soul hath been with its God in a corner, the effects of it are so remarkable, that others shall take knowledge of him that hath been with Jesus: and it must needs be so, for conversing with God is of a transforming nature, 2 Cor. iii. 18. *But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord:* God's appointments are as glasses through which we may see the face of God. Now there are two sorts of glasses, broader and narrower; the broader glasses are public ordinances, and the narrower glasses are these private duties: in both these a soul may seek and see the face of God, and so become like him; for seeing here is assimilating; as the vision of God hereafter is glorifying: Oh, it is a beautifying and beatifical sight to see God! Fulness of grace is the best thing in glory; peace and joy are but, as it were, the gloss and varnish of this fulness of grace: now the more a soul enjoys God,

God, the more God-like and heaven-like he is, for his graces shine brighter, and he is still mounting higher: and private or secret duties are notable ways of communion with God: yea, sometimes a soul may miss of Christ in public ordinances, and find him in secret; so some interpret that place in Cant. iii. 24. The soul had sought her beloved in the bed of temple-worship and public ordinances; in the streets and broad ways of synagogues, and communion of saints, still she found not her beloved; then she seeks him in conferences, and occasional meeting with the watchmen, but she can yet hear no tidings of Jesus Christ; but, saith she, *It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth.* Observe it, this was not when she was past all means, in a way of neglect of, or being above ordinances; for she was seeking him still, which implies the use of means only; she had past the public without finding, and now she is in the use of private helps, the after-duties of meditation, self-examination, secret prayer, and therein the soul finds God; not that this reflects disparagement on the public ordinances, but to shew that God is a free agent, and to be an engagement and encouragement to us in the use of all God's appointments: and when the soul thus finds God in a corner, it carries away something of God, that casts a sweet perfume upon his person and acting, that is taken notice of by others; it may be said of such a soul, as Isaac spoke of his son Jacob, Gen. xxvii. 27. *See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.* So, when a serious Christian comes down from his

closet, where he hath met with his God, oh what a sweet perfume of well-scented graces doth he cast forth! The favour of religion is upon him, some breathing odours of holiness break from his lips, hands, and feet; the power of godliness doth manifest itself in his expressions, actions, conversation: where hath such an one been? Surely he hath been conversing with God; there is the lively image and inscription of God upon him; and while that blessed frame continues, he is not like himself: as he excels carnal men at all times; so now he excels himself: yea, observe it, a soul conversing much with God, in the duties of meditation and secret prayer, grows taller by head and shoulders than other ordinary Christians: as all godly men are more excellent than their neighbours, so a soul, that waits much on God in secret prayer, is more excellent than most of his godly neighbours; and it appears so, at present, by his gifts in praying, and may appear in his support and comfort in the day of suffering. Oh, what a mighty man in closet-prayer was magnanimous Luther? And what noble achievements did he go through? William Gardiner, martyr in Portugal, sought out solitary places for prayer, before he attempted that strange act of public opposition to idolatry, in taking the host out of the cardinal's hand, trampling it under his feet, and, with the other hand, overthrew the chalice: which act, though it may seem scarce warrantable in an ordinary way, yet shewed an heroic spirit for the main, obtained by a conscientious attendance upon God, in the duty of secret prayer. Take one instance more, it is Mr.

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Mr. George Wiscard [or Wiseheart], one of the holiest men, and choicest reformers, that Scotland ever had. One night he got up, and went into a yard, there he walked in an alley for some space, breathing forth many sobs and deep groans; then he fell upon his knees, and his groans increased; then he fell upon his face. Two men watched him, and heard him weeping and praying near an hour; and so went to bed again. As this saint was much with God, so the Lord was much with him in preaching, prophesying, acting bravely, and suffering death cheerfully. Surely the Spirit of God and of glory rested upon this man of God, if ever upon any, the adversaries themselves being judges. This is a great truth, they have been most eminent, that have been most with God in secret prayer; let Scripture and history speak; time and room would fail me to enumerate. Who more famous for piety and learning, of late years, than the great Usher? It was his usual practice to sequester himself into some privacy, and to spend it in strict examination, penitential humiliation, and ardent supplication; and this he found sweet to his soul; and others saw the effect. [Dr. Bernard, the life and death of Dr. Usher, p. 27.]

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#### S E C T. VI.

*The last Reward of Secret Prayer is at the great Day.*

4. **T**HE last and chiefest reward, that our heavenly Father will bestow on those that have waited on God in secret prayer, will be

be the open acknowledgement and acceptance of them at that solemn day of judgment; when the whole world shall be summoned before the Lord, *And every one shall receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad*, 2 Cor. v. 10. Then our blessed Saviour, who shall be judge, will single out this seed of Jacob, and tell them they have not sought his face in vain; he will now solemnly acknowledge them before his Father, and all the holy angels, as persons with whom he hath had familiar acquaintance in a corner. Oh, the joy and triumph in such a public acknowledgement! when our dear Redeemer shall speak such a language as this, before those myriads of creatures! This or that soul (calling it forth with honour), though not taken notice of in the world for religion, much less for worldly greatness, hath yet had intimate familiarity with myself, and I with him; he hath performed many a solemn duty, which none but an omniscient eye hath seen: though he hath lived obscurely in the world, and hath been little known to eminent preachers or professors, yet he and I have been long and well acquainted. I have had his company many times in a corner; and now I cannot but remember the kindness of his youth and old age; the love of his espousals, when he went after me in solitary places, rather than want my presence: he hath visited me in duty, and I have visited him in mercy: oh, what mutual embraces, and reciprocal exchanges of love have there been betwixt us! He hath owned me, and I have owned him in the day of adversity: whenever he had any doubt or want,

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or fear, or affliction, I heard from him in a closet; he sent his winged messenger of a believing prayer to the throne of grace, and I took it well from him. I did not despise his person, or deny his suit; when others have been sporting away time in vain recreations, or damning their souls in profane practices, this ransomed believer, when he could steal a little time, run into a corner, and there did make his moan to me; and then I gave him something worth his pains; I sent him away with a cheerful heart, and thankful tongue: and now take notice, all ye angels and men, I declare that I accept this soul's labour of love, and pardon all its imperfections, and set him in my immediate presence, in eternal mansions: he that separated himself from the world, shall now be separated from the goats, and be set on my right hand; he that longed so much to enjoy me, shall everlastingly enjoy me, without cessation, or interruption: oh, blessed day! oh, transcendent reward! Is not this a rewarding openly? You will say, How do you know that Jesus Christ will thus bespeak a praying soul? I reply, though we know not the form of words he will speak, yet that a discovery shall be made of the acts of piety and charity, Matt. xxv. evidently declares. Yea, that secret duties shall be brought to light, as well as secret sins; the Scriptures declare, 1 Cor. iv. 5. *Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall every man have praise of God: then good men shall receive open approbation and commendation, for their holy exercises in secret places:*

places: then will God wipe off all reproaching calumnies of black-mouthed liars, wherewith they have bespattered the reputation of praying saints; and clear up their uprightness, as the noon-day, by letting the world see how the saints spent their time in corners, both alone, and with their fellow-Christians; not in plotting, but in praying; yea, pleading for those that persecuted them. Oh blessed day! Oh happy resurrection of bodies, and of names! Surely, then, praying souls will not then repent themselves of all their pains in private, when they poured out their hearts in prayers and tears, since now they are rewarded with such a blessed *euge*, and are openly entertained into their Master's joy, and Father's kingdom.

### C H A P. III.

#### *The first Use—of Information.*

#### S E C T. I.

#### *Concerning Places of Prayer.*

I. **I**F closet-prayer be a Christian duty, then it shews us, that in gospel-times God stands not precisely upon places; this holy incense may ascend to heaven with as much acceptance upon the golden altar (the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ), as well in a private chamber as a public church. Some have scornfully called private devotions by the derogating title of chimney-prayers, and think to confine all religion to public



public places: yea, a great scholar said once, God heard prayer in a consecrated place, not because men pray, but because they pray there; as though the conceited holiness of the place added some virtue to the prayer, or rendered it more acceptable to God. This is worse than plain Judaism, to tie religion to places: the true gospelized Christian hath otherwise learned Christ. It is true, in the Old Testament dispensation, after the erecting of the temple, prayer was to be made at it, or towards it, as it typified Christ, by whom our prayers are accepted: but that holiness being ceremonial, it is now abolished by the gospel: now that takes place in John, iv. 21. *Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem, worship the Father; i. e.* God now doth not so much stand upon the place, as the manner of worship, *that they worship him in spirit and in truth*, ver. 23, 24. Now is the prophecy accomplished, Mal. i. 11. *In every place incense shall be offered to my name*: which the apostle also asserts expressly, 1 Tim. ii. 8. Much hath been said in controversy concerning the holiness of places; but this seems to be an undeniable argument against that conceit, that if some places be holy by the church's consecration of them to holy uses, then it followeth that other places, not so consecrated, howbeit applied to the same holy use, are more profane, and less apt to divine worship than places consecrated; which would directly contradict the Scriptures last mentioned. Indeed Hooker teacheth, that the service of God in places not sanctified, as churches are, hath not in itself such perfect-

perfection of grace and comeliness, as when the dignity of the place (which it wisheth for) doth concur, and that the very majesty and holiness of the place where God is worshipped, bettereth even our holiest and best actions: thus he. To whom we dare not subscribe; but rather say, with Dr. John Reynolds, that to us Christians no land is strange, no ground unholy: every coast is Jewry, every town Jerusalem, and every house Zion; and every faithful company, yea, every faithful body, a temple to serve God in.

But I shall not undertake a dispute upon this subject; the duty of the text clears it: if God command and accept closet-prayer, then he doth not make so great a matter of the place for this duty, as some imagine, since it cannot be imagined that closet-prayer can be performed ordinarily in a consecrated place, as they call it, and there being no such place where a duty can be performed, to which God hath more expressly promised a reward, than what is performed in a corner or closet; and therefore we have no warrant to expect acceptance meerly upon the account of one place more than another.

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## S E C T. II.

### *The Nature of Prayer.*

2. **W**E may hence be informed concerning the nature, usefulness, excellency, and efficacy of the duty of prayer: I speak not now of prayer in general, but in reference to closet-prayer.

prayer. And on that account there are two confectaries hence, concerning prayer:

1. It follows that prayer is an immediate worship of God: for what hath been said shews, that we have to do immediately with God, yea, that a man alone singly hath to do with God; therein it is different from other parts of God's instituted worship, which doth necessarily require company; as in preaching of the word, there must be hearers; in the seals of the covenant, as in baptism and the Lord's supper, there must be a society, such a number as may be called a church: hence, the latter is called a communion, because, saith the apostle, *We, being many, are one bread, and one body,* 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. But it is not absolutely or essentially requisite to prayer, that there be a society; one man or woman, by him or herself alone, may perform this duty of prayer as acceptably to God, as if in the company of a thousand saints: we deny not the public or private meetings of God's people for prayer; but withal affirm, that the nature of the duty is such, that it may be performed solitary and alone: hence schoolmen distinguish of prayer, that it is either common or singular: both have their place and use: though they lay great stress upon Christ's promise, in Matth. xviii. 20. promising to be where two or three are met in his name; which as we deny not, so we assert the force of this prayer of a single person, according to the text: we give both their due, without comparisons.

2. Prayer cannot be stopt in its ascent to God: all the persecutor's on earth cannot hinder a soul's praying. This is demonstrated two

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ways. 1. A child of God, banished out of all human society, may pray still. Suppose a man were rejected by men, and ejected out of all companies of men, and were shut up in the closest prison, or shut out in the remotest wilderness; suppose a man were in the caves and dens of the earth; yet still he might pray and be heard, according to Solomon's prayer, That if God's people were carried captive into the land of their enemies, far or near, yet if they repented and prayed unto God towards their land, and that house of God; then he begs that God would hear them; and God testifies that he did hear this prayer of Solomon, 1 Kings, viii. 46. 48. with chap. ix. 3. The passage to heaven is as near and open from one part of the earth as another; therefore David saith, he *will cry to God from the end of the earth*, Psal. lxi. 2. A notable instance for this we have in Jonah; he was got into the bottom of the sea (as far from heaven, locally, as one could imagine), into a great fish's belly, which he calls the very belly of hell; and as he was then far from men, so he looks upon himself as cast out of the sight of God; and he pathetically expresseth his misery and hopeless state. What doth he in this doleful plight? Why, he will look towards God's holy temple. Alas, poor Jonah knew not now which way the temple stood; he had but a short prospect in that dark and narrow prison; yes, faith can set Jonah upon one of the mountains of Israel, that thence he may see as far as Mount Zion, and reach as high as heaven: he prays, yea, cries: God hears, and delivers: as low as he was, he knocks at heaven's gates;



gates; and his prayer doth pierce the clouds; it makes bold, and steps in: *My prayer*, saith he, *came in unto thee, into thine holy temple*, Jonah, ii. 2. 7. Oh, the strange and swift motion of a believing prayer! Let the praying soul be where it will, the prayer will come to God's ear, and get an answer.

2. A child of God, that cannot speak a word, may put up an acceptable prayer: suppose the tongue, which is the organ of speech, were cut out, yet a saint cannot thereby be obstructed in his access to God by prayer. For, as Amesius saith, prayer is formally the act of the will; desire is the soul of prayer, which God may hear, though it be not expressed; for he knows the heart, Psal. x. 17. *Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble*. A saint's desire is a real prayer; if the desire be right, words are but the outward garb, habit, or cloaths (as I may so say) of prayer, the carcase or shell of the duty; ardent desires are the iife, kernel, marrow of the performance: hence we find that Moses, Hannah, and Nehemiah, are said to pray, when Scripture doth not express a word they speak, nor is it probable they did make an articulate sound, Exod. xiv. 15. 1 Sam. i. 13. Neh. ii. 4. I speak not this, to indulge carnal men in their lazy conceited ejaculations, as though they could pray well enough, and never speak; or while they are working, walking, talking: let me hint a word (by the way) to these. Consider, silly soul, God hath given thee a body, and thou must offer it to God, as a reasonable sacrifice; thou art bound, in conscience, to pray and praise God with thy tongue,

which is thy glory; yea, let me tell thee, if thou hast those members of body, and an opportunity to pray thus solemnly with thy tongue upon thy knees, and dost never do it, I question whether thou prayest at all or no, since thou livest in the apparent neglect of a known duty: what I speak of the saints real (though sometimes without vocal) prayers, is to commend the duty, and comfort those saints that may be put to these exigencies, that though they cannot speak, yet they may pray, and be heard and answered.

## S E C T. III.

*Shewing the Power of Prayer.*

**I** Might from hence take occasion to discover the strength and efficacy of this duty of prayer, from the consideration of closet-prayer; though but a poor single person get upon his knees in a corner, and have no creature to help him; yet he can even undertake to grapple with the omnipotent and eternal God; yea, by his strength may have power with God; as we heard of Jacob, who, by single wrestling with him (hand to fist, as it were), wrestled a blessing from him: one poor single Elijah could stand against at least four hundred prophets of Baal, and prevail, having recourse to the living God by prayer, 1 Kings, xviii. 36. yea, the apostle tells us, that this Elijah, though but a mortal man, yet he shut up and opened heaven, that it rained, and rained not, according to his prayer; hence he infers an universal maxim,

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*That the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*; and illustrates it by that notable instance, James, v. 16, 17, 18. But some may object, Elijah was a great prophet, an extraordinary person; he might prevail when we cannot: he answers, he was no more than a man, *a man subject to like passions as we are*, a sinful creature; he prevailed not for any merits of his own, but through faith in the Mediator of the covenant, and so may we. There is not the meanest child of God but hath the same plea. God hath strength enough to give, (saith Mr. Gurnal on Eph. vi. 10.) but he hath no strength to deny. Here the Almighty himself (with reverence be it spoken) is weak: even a child, the weakest in grace of his family, that can but say, Father, is able to overcome him; for prayer is in a sort omnipotent; it can conquer the invincible Jehovah, and bind the hands (as it were) of an omnipotent God; so that God is fain to cry out to wrestling Moses, Let me alone. It is said of Luther, That man could do with God even what he would. Prayer hath a kind of commanding, compulsive power. That is a strange text, Isa. xlv. 11. *Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me*: so some take it; ye shall find me as ready to do you service, as if ye had me at command: yet this must be warily received; not as though God were forced to any thing against his will, but when God's people pray aright in the name of Christ, according to his will, he heareth them, 1 John, v. 14. and this he attributes to prayer, for the credit of that duty, and encouragement of praying souls.

souls. That is a notable text, to shew the readiness of God to answer prayer, John, xvi. 26, 27. *I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you.* Christ, in this place, doth not simply deny that he will interceed for them; but shews how ready God is, of his own accord, to grant the saint's petitions: they shall not be put to any great trouble about it, but shall be quickly dispatched in their errand to the throne of grace: for, as Luther speaks, a poor groan, in the ears of God, is a mighty noise; and doth so fill heaven and earth, that God can hear nothing besides it, and silenceth all other tumults to hearken to it.

Of what an easy quick access,  
My blessed Lord, art thou! How suddenly  
May our requests thy ear invade,  
To shew that state dislikes not easiness!  
If I but lift mine eyes, my suit is made,  
Thou canst no more not hear, than thou canst die.  
See more in Herbert's Poems, page 95.

#### S E C T. IV.

*Shewing the Property of a true Christian.*

**O**NCE more I might shew the duty and property of a sincere Christian, that can make this excellent use of solitariness: carnal persons love not to be alone, except they be such whose constitution inclines them to melancholy, and then they sit poring on things without profit; it is only the gracious soul that can tell how to make the right use of solitariness, by having

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recourse to God: no man cares for being alone, but the serious person; and no man cares for going to God when alone, but the sincere Christian. Man is a sociable creature, and naturally we have no mind to entertain ourselves by ourselves: a carnal heart hates a domestical audit; men that have shrewish wives, love not to be at home, and persons that have guilty consciences, cannot endure to hold discourse with them, lest they be tormented before the time: oh, but a Christian that is upright, and downright, would know all that concerns his own heart, the best and worst; therefore he communes with his own heart, as David did, Psal. lxxvii. 7. and, lest he miss or mistake in his search, he turns him to the heart-searching God by prayer, and cries out to him to search his heart, and discover him to himself: the life of religion consists in a soul's communion with God in secret; a man hath so much religion as he hath betwixt God and his own soul, and no more: a true saint dares approve his heart to God in a corner; he is there exercising himself, like a soldier by himself, handling his pike, and keeping his postures, that he may be better fitted for a more solemn onset: yea, a Christian doth purposely withdraw himself from company, that he may converse with God. Papists are true Christian apes; hence comes the solitary life of Monks, pretending to imitate Elijah and Elisha, John Baptist and the Apostles: but it is acknowledged by Hierom, and great sticklers for a monastic life, that this practice begun not 'till about the year 260 or 300. Some say Hilarion, others Paulus Thebeas, others Antonius, begun this  
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manner of conversation: but certainly there is a vast difference betwixt those ancient Christians solitary life, and the Papists way of monastic living. 1. Those first Christians lived solitary of necessity, that they might lie hid more safely in a time of persecution. 2. They were not compelled to give all to the poor. 3. They were not bound to a certain rule, nor did they engage themselves by a perpetual vow to that place and state, but might change their manner of life if they saw good; they were not bound as to meats, marriage, fasting. 4. These ancient monks were of the laity, not of the clergy, nay, not so much as deacons or presbyters. 5. They had no conceit of merit in a monastic life, till these latter ages. I may add, 6. Those ancient Monks had a particular calling, and did work, as the Monks of Bangor, that lived by the sweat of their brows; and, 7. They were not tied up from conversing abroad, as there was occasion; and occasions there are manifold. It is not fit persons should be always cooped up in a corner, but that they be of use to others in their places and capacities: we were not born for ourselves, nor must we live only within ourselves, which would contradict the law of love and charity: a constant solitariness exposeth persons to a world of temptations; it is not good to be alone, saith Solomon. An ancient could speak it from his own experience, that a solitary life is inferior to a common conversing, because it is full of importunate cogitations, which, like little flies arising from dung, fly in the eyes of the heart, and interrupt the sabbath of the mind.

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But I need not trouble you with the mention of Popish fopperies. A right-bred Christian, that hath learned the truth as it is in Jesus, being thrust into a corner, knows how to improve solitariness for soul-advantage; and voluntarily doth withdraw himself into a corner, that he may set himself to the work of God in good earnest: hence saith the apostle, concerning husband and wife, 1 Cor. vii. 5. *Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer.* Thence note, that it is convenient sometimes for Christians to sequester themselves from nearest relations, that they may have freer communion with God in holy duties: only let these four cautions and limitations of the text be observed: 1. That it be with mutual consent. 2. But for a season. 3. The end and advantage, for fasting and prayer. 4. That they come together again. This respects not every day's ordinary performances, but some solemn undertakings of stated and extraordinary fasts, in a day of danger or calamity; at which time *the bridegroom is to go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet*, Joel, ii. 16. *i. e.* to sequester themselves from conjugal delights, to afflict their souls by fasting and prayer: but in these cases, a sound Christian's due discretion, regulated by the general rules laid down in Scripture, will help in such performances, that he may not dash on either rock of superstition or negligence; but maintain a close and constant communion with God, both in the duties of his general and particular calling in public ordinances, and in private and secret duties.

Thus much for the first Use.

## C H A P. IV.

*The second Use—of Reprehension.*

## S E C T. I.

*Wicked Men reprov'd.*

1. **H**ERE is just ground of sharp rebuke to all graceless, prayerless persons, who understand nothing of this duty; they know not what it is to tug and struggle with the Lord in closet-prayer. David saith, *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts*, Psal. x. 4. He cannot pray aright any where, much less in secret; the same Psalm tells us what he doth in secret, ver. 8, 9, 10. *In the secret places doth he murder the innocent; his eyes are privily set against the poor.* The apostle saith, *It is a shame ever to speak of those things that are done of them in secret*, Eph. v. 12. Oh the abominable practices of profane spirits in a corner! Their consciences can tell them sad stories of secret sins, which none but the God of heaven and themselves know of; yea, because they see not God, they think God sees not them; like the silly bird, because she thrusts her head into a bush, thinks she is hid from the fowler, though her body be exposed to open view; carnal men's maxim is like that monkish one, "Carry it warily, if not chastly;" if they can hide their sin from men, they take no notice whether God sees them, or no; and, from wishing that he did not see, begin to suspect whether he



he do see or no; and at last arrive to those men's arrogant demand, Who seeth us? Or that positive conclusion, Psal. xcvi. 4. *The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard.* But what saith the Psalmist to these brutish fots? *He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?* ver. 9. Let these Atheists know, that God sees, and sets down all their secret wickedness, and will bring it forth before angels and men at the great day of reckoning: the sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with a point of a diamond, Jer. xvii. 1. it can never be razed out by the blood of Christ; and though, by multiplied acts of notorious sinning, some may blur the engravings of sin on the table of their heart, yet it shall be as writing with the juice of lemons, being held to the fire of God's wrath, it is as legible to the conscience as the first moment when the sin was committed. Oh the secret wickednesses that wicked men have to reckon for! but where are the secret prayers? Alas! how rarely, or how formally do they wait on God alone! Custom, vain-glory, and carnal interest, may put them on joining in public prayer, or family-duty; but they are strangers to this spiritual self-denying duty of closet-prayer: the carnal hypocrite exposeth all to open view; he is like a house with a beautiful frontispiece, but every room within is dark, as one saith; he is a rotten post, fairly gilded; he hath dressed himself in the garb of religion, and will be as devout as the best in temple-worship; but follow him to his closet, he cannot afford God one hour in a week; he doth not make conscience of secret prayer:

prayer: this gains him no credit with men, and therefore is little used. This rightly performed, opens the heart to God, which the unsound professor dare not do: I shall shew hereafter, whether the hypocrite may use closet-prayer, and wherein he is distinguished from a sincere soul in that duty: at present I am reprov-  
 ing those that never use it, that look upon it as below them, they either dare not be alone, or scorn to stoop so low, and sigh out their hearts to God in a corner, as though they would not be beholden to the great God for any mercy; but in their hearts and practice speak the language of those proud Athiests in Jer. ii. 31. *We are lords, we will come no more unto thee:* but let such know, they shall die like men, and be damned like devils, that imagine they are gods, and will not be beholden to our God for mercy. Lord have mercy on these poor prayerless sinners, that understand not the necessity and mystery of closet-prayer, but look upon it as needless, and are ready to say, It is more ado than needs. But let these prepare to make good that desperate assertion at the bar of God's justice, with flames about their ears; and let such know, that God will answer their cavils against plain duty after another manner than his ministers can do now. To which dreadful judgment we leave them, except prevented by a speedy and sincere repentance.

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## S E C T. II.

*The Godly reproved.*

**B**UT the persons to be principally reproved at present are the professors of religion, that acknowledge this to be a duty, but grievously neglect it. I fear God's children are not so constant and conscientious in the performance of this duty of closet-prayer as they ought to be. Are not good souls guilty of frequent omissions, intermissions, at least negligent performance, of this duty? It was one of old Mr. Dod's instructions, that at night we should ask ourselves, Have I twice this day humbled myself before God in private \*? And again, How did I pray in faith and love? I am afraid many of us should give but a sorry account of these serious inquiries; let us be ashamed, lay it to our hearts, and give God glory, by repentance and reformation.

For the humbling of our hearts in this case, let me propound these ten awakening interrogatories, that we may mourn for our neglect of this duty of closet-prayer.

1. Are you not very unlike Jesus Christ? Is not he the perfect copy that we should write after? And do we not find him often in private prayer? We meet with him in this solitary duty sometimes in the day, sometimes in the night, sometimes all night; in a garden, in a mountain, he

\* Who goes to bed and doth not pray,  
Maketh two nights to every day.

HERBERT.

took all opportunities to go to his Father, Luke, vi. 12. Matt. xxvi. 36. *All the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears,* Heb. v. 7. As he was a man of sorrows, so he was a man of prayers, and the sharper his sorrows, the stronger his cries, Luke, xxii. 44. *Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly:* and was not this for our example, and for our advantage? Should we not learn of him? Nay; doth not our very Christianity consist in our conformity to Christ? Alas, how unlike him are most of us? Shall we pass for Christians, that follow not his steps? Was it not blessed Paul's study and ambition, to be conformed to this blessed pattern? Can we imitate a better person? Was it necessary Christ should wrestle for us, and is it not necessary we should wrestle with God for our own souls? Or, doth Christ's praying for us, excuse our pleading for ourselves? No, no; as it was for our example and benefit in the days of his flesh, so his present intercession in heaven doth both imply and encourage our praying; for we are to ask in his name, and employ our dear Advocate, that we may speed; and shall not we (as it were) set him a work, and send up our prayers to be mixed with his sweet incense? The Lord humble us for, and pardon to us our neglects and omissions!

2. Are you not herein very unlike the saints of God? The seed of Jacob are wrestlers with God. God hath no children still-born, they all cry, Abba Father. Jacob wrestled with God in secret prayer, and ever since, all the saints in all ages have born that name, Psal.



xxiv. 6. *This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob, Selah; i. e. that seek the God of Jacob, as Jacob did.* And indeed every one that is godly will thus pray, Psal. xxxii. 6. There might be brought a cloud of witnesses, in all ages, of praying saints, that conversed with God in secret. It is recorded of the apostle James, that his knees were as hard as camels feet, with praying. Some have sought out for private places to pray in, others have risen out of their beds to pray; others have set days apart to humble themselves in secret by fasting and prayer; others would never adventure on business without seeking God. Such as are acquainted with ecclesiastical histories, or Christian experiences, may find store of instances of this sort: and why should we be unlike our brethren? Have we not all one Spirit, as well as all one Father? And is not this a Spirit of grace and supplication? And is it not that which on all occasions draws the soul to its Father? It is said of Paul, when newly converted, *Behold he prayeth*, Acts, ix. 11. Others do not see it, but I know it; there he is in a corner, sighing and seeking me: go, Ananias, enquire for him, he is now one of you, a real convert, for, *Behold he prayeth*: A soul praying in secret is worthy observation; there is an *ecce* put upon it, *Behold he prayeth*! And why should we, that pretend to be saints, be unlike our brethren?

3. Are you nor herein unlike yourselves in former times? When God did at first work upon your hearts, did you not then run to God in a corner? Did you not set yourselves intently to the duty of secret prayer? How often did

God find you by yourselves, sighing, sorrowing, weeping, bleeding, breathing after God, pouring out your hearts like water before the face of the Lord? and your heavenly Father pitied you, spoke very kindly to you, wiped off your tears, cheered your hearts, heard your prayers, and made those days of grief times of love. Oh the sweet embraces that then were betwixt your souls and God! Have you forgotten such a chamber, such a closet, such a barn, such a wood, where you sometimes walked and meditated, sometimes fell prostrate and wept before the Lord, till you had no more power to weep? If you have forgotten those blessed days, your God hath not: *He remembers thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after him in a solitary wilderness,* Jer. ii. 2. Canst not thou remember the day when thou wouldest rather have been with thy God in a private room, than upon a prince's throne? Yea, thou thoughtest thou wast to do nothing else but cry and pray in secret; thou wast at it every day; yea, many times a day: how comes it to pass that there is such a change? that thou dost so rarely go to visit thy old friend in a corner? Is he changed? Is he not so good and kind as he was wont to be? Hast thou found any fault in God? Or art thou not blameworthy? What is become of thy ancient spirit of prayer? Why dost thou forget thy sweetest wrestling-place? Why dost thou not enquire for these good old ways of communion with thy God?

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## S E C T. III.

*Saints Neglect further reprov'd.*

4. **L**ET me further expostulate with God's children, that are rarely exercised in this duty of secret prayer.

Do you not deprive yourselves of many sweet refreshments? Have not your souls had sweet experience of ravishing incomes in secret duties? How many pleasant morsels have you eaten alone? Have not these stolen waters been sweet? And would they not be so again, if you would open the same sluice? Oh, what hints of love might your souls have, that no creature would know of! Secret influences are conveyed to souls in secret duties; these you block up by neglect: ah, Sirs! are the consolations of God small to you? Is communion with God of no worth? Why are you so unwilling to take pains to go to your Father? Especially, when you know he hath a kindness for you? Have you ever lost by such duties? Will not your gains infinitely countervail your pains? Ask those that use it most, they will tell you, it is the sweetest time they spend: yea, cannot your own experience attest it? Did you ever lose your labour, when you set yourselves about the work in good earnest? Hath not this close and privy trading with God, brought in much spiritual profit? Beloved friends, you little consider the good you miss of, for want of performing this excellent duty: but that is not all.

5. Do you not, by neglect of secret prayer,

expose yourselves to many sad temptations? watching and prayer are singular helps against temptation, Mat. xxvi. 41. I have heard, that Satan hath openly professed that he hath watched when some of God's children have gone out without closet-prayer, and that day he hath gotten great advantage against them; sometimes by tripping up their heels, and casting them down from their excellency, into some gross iniquity; sometimes tormenting their hearts with blasphemous, or soul-perplexing injections: sometimes God hath left them to fall into some afflictive snare, laid by this subtil fowler, which hath cost them many bitter pangs; all this, and much more, hath been the fruit of such neglects: Christians, have you not found this too true by sad experience? When you have gone abroad without calling on God, hath not God secretly withdrawn from you? Hath not Satan obtained his designs upon you? Have not your hearts been growing out of frame? some lust increasing, grace decaying, and your souls at the brink of some astonishing fall? When you have gone out in the morning without a good breakfast with God, have you not been apt to gather wind and vanity, to the prejudice of your soul's health? If you engage not God by prayer to go with you, what security have you for that day? If God leave you, the devil may do what he list with you, and hamper you in a thousand snares and sins.

6. Doth not your neglect of secret prayer argue little love to God? or delight to be in his company? When persons have a dear affection to each other, they love to be together: love delights in union and communion. Yea, when persons

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persons love entirely, they withdraw from other company, that they may enjoy each other with more endeared familiarity; the presence of a third mixeth the streams of communication, and mars their intimate communion: and if you did passionately love the Lord, would you not withdraw from others, that your souls might enjoy some fresh and refreshing intercourse with your best beloved? How can you say you love him, when you have no mind of his company? If you did indeed love him, you would hold him, and not let him go, until you had (with the spouse, Cant. iii. 5.) brought him into the chambers of intimate communion, and solitary recesses: love is the weight of the soul, and draws it to the object beloved: if your hearts were ravished with him, you would take more pleasure in conversing with him; you would bless God for an opportunity of enjoying him: but this strangeness speaks a great defect in this noble grace: and would you be esteemed such as love not God? What a sad thing is it to be low and scant in love to God, under such strong engagements to love? Poor soul! have not those silken silver cords of love, which have been cast about thee, drawn thee nearer, and bound thee faster to thy God than thus? Have not such bellows and incentives kindled and increased thy spark of love into a flame? Lament thy sin, and shame thyself before thy God, for this decay of love, and dangerous neglect.

Do not you, by these omissions, declare yourselves ingrate to the grace of God? It is God's way to hire souls to approach him, by holding out promises of reward, as we do offer apples, fruit,

fruit, &c. to children, to entice them to us; nor is it a bait to couzen and ensnare us, but real offers of kindness to us, whereof we may partake, and wherewith we may be happy. Suppose a prince desire a beggar's company, with expressions of dear affections, and promises of many kindnesses; is it not gross ingratitude, if she sling away, and scorn the motion? or, suppose a potent person send to a poor man a loving message, telling him he hath considered his case, and hath appointed time and place, that they two together may confer about the necessary concernments of this poor man; he shall have free admission and liberty, without disturbance, to present this petition; and ask what he will, and it shall be granted; none shall be present, but only they two shall converse familiarly together, for the good of the poor man: but instead of a thankful acceptance of this kindness, the poor man picks quarrels with the messenger or message, grows sullen and perverse, runs away, and saith, I need neither his counsel nor assistance; let him bestow his kindness where he will, I will not meddle with him: were not this gross ingratitude? and how would it be taken? The case is thine, soul, that neglectest secret duties; the God of heaven gives thee notice to meet him in such a room, to negotiate freely the main concernments of thy precious soul, and thou art coy and shy, and wilt not come near him; but either plainly deniest, or heedlessly delayest: oh monstrous folly! oh gross ingratitude! Be ashamed of it, be humbled for it; thy God takes it ill that thou art so loath to be happy, that thou even forsakest thine own mercies,

mercies, and wilt go twice as far another way to gratify a friend, rather than go alone into thy closet to please thy God, and profit thy poor soul: how long must God watch and wait, and strive and sue to have thy company; and thou dost still neglect, and grow averse thereto? Oh be ashamed of it!

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## S E C T. VI.

*Three more sad Considerations for our Humiliation.*

8. **D**O you not, by neglect of secret prayer, resist the motions of the blessed Spirit? And is this no fault? Is it nothing to neglect communion with God the Father, or to improve the intercession of Jesus Christ the Mediator; but you must also slight the motions of God the blessed Spirit? this is sad: how often doth the Holy Ghost knock at your doors, stir you up, spur you forwards unto duty, and take you by the hand, offering its assistance if you will go to God, and yet do you refuse? Do you make nothing of quenching, grieving, yea, vexing the good Spirit of God? Consider what you do; as you deal with it, so it will deal with you; if you do not embrace its call, perhaps it will not be present at your call: and what can you do in duty without it? If you strive against it, it will cease striving with you: be it known to you, you have not this heavenly wind at your command; and you may toss in the boat of duty long, but shall not approach the port without it: nothing but the Spirit of God can carry thy

thy soul to God: and what can excite and comfort thee, when thy Assistant and Comforter is slighted and sadned? Grieve therefore, Christian, for thy grieving of the Spirit, lay to hear thy careless quenching of this holy fire; and let those waters of lust or negligence, cost thee the waters of godly sorrow and repentance, that this sin may not be laid to thy charge: say, as that divine poet—

And art thou grieved, sweet and sacred dove,  
When I am sowr,  
And cross thy love?

Grieved for me! The God of strength and power  
Griev'd for a worm, which when I tread,  
I pass away, and leave it dead.

See the rest in Herbert's Poems, on Eph. v. 30. p. 128.

9. If you can only pray in company, what will you do when your company is gone? A time may come when you may be left alone, as Christ saith he was. You had need engage the Father to be with you, that you may say, as the apostle, 1 John, i. 3. *Truly, our fellowship is with the Father*: it is true, communion of saints is desirable, but external communion is not always attainable; you may be thrust out by divine Providence; now it will be sad, to be at a loss when persons are alone. It is a strange expression of some, that they know not how to live, if such and such Christian friends, or godly relations be taken away; why, what is the matter? Are they in the place of God? Is your spiritual life maintained by the leaden pipes, or by the living springs that stream through them? Alas! sirs, if you more understood and used this art of drawing influences from God immediately, though



through Christ by secret prayer, you would not be so discouraged with the loss of friends; you would say, Indeed, it is true, my loss is great; such a one had a notable gift in prayer, and spoke my very heart to God; but though he is gone, is my God gone? is prayer gone? Though I cannot get such moving expressions as such had, yet I opened my heart to God, as I could in secret formerly; and there is the same refuge now, the same road unto this city and sanctuary I went in; and therefore all my comfort is not gone, blessed be my God: but a poor soul that hath leaned upon the staff of others enlargements, will be shrewdly put to it when that staff is gone: and is it not a great disparagement to a noble and immortal soul, that it cannot treat and entertain its God alone? What, cannot God and an heaven-born soul converse together without auxiliaries? Must another interpose, as an instrument, without whom you cannot enjoy communion with God? Be ashamed of it, and chide yourselves, as not acting suitably to your rational spirits, much less to a supernatural principle of grace.

10. Lastly, Let me further demand of you, What if our Lord should call you away, and find you under the guilt of the neglect of this known duty! What confusion, grief, and jealousy would possess you, if death arrest you in such a state? What an hurry was forlorn Saul in, when the Philistines were upon him, and he had not offered sacrifice unto God? And what a desperate plunge will you be put to, when the king of terrors is upon you, and you have not personally and privately been seeking God? Though

Though you may be right and safe for the main, yet your spirits will be much perplexed, and you will suffer shrewd rebukes from your own consciences, for your omissions; and will be put to that last prayer of a dying saint (eminent in the church), "The Lord forgive me my sins of omission;" and, possibly, may want that spiritual solace in a dying hour, that praying souls may have: Oh, what a blessed thing will it be, if our dear Redeemer find a soul upon its knees before the Lord! Oh, the hearty welcome it will give unto its God! This is the time he waited for; he was got into a corner, was sighing for his sins, pleading for mercy, breathing after grace, and panting for glory; and, behold, what a quick return doth his God make? Even while he is speaking and praying, the Lord doth send a guard of angels, to conduct the soul into eternal mansions, where God and the soul shall part no more. Blessed, for ever happy is that soul, whom its Lord, when he cometh, *shall find so doing!* Now, consider of it, whether state would you be found in? And do not you know his coming may be sudden and unexpected? Would you be found under neglect, or in the faithful performance of a duty? Would you not be carried from your closet-devotion, to eternal communion with God? Oh, then, take our Lord's most wholesome counsel, *Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is,* Mark, xiii. 33.

I might here challenge Christians also, not only for their neglect of, but careless performance of, this duty of closet-prayer. With what sorry shifts do we put off God? How hard, dead,

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dead, unbelieving, distracted, are our hearts in secret? God takes much pleasure in adverbs: it pleaseth not God that a duty be done, except it be well done. Many satisfy their own consciences that they have prayed, but consider not how they prayed. There is a curse on such as do the work of God negligently; and that have in their flock a male, and offer to the Lord a corrupt thing, Jer. xlviii. 13. Mal. i. 14. And it is a fearful thing to get a curse upon our knees, when we come for a blessing. Look to it, God takes notice how you pray; the devil stands under your closet window, and heareth what you say to God in secret, all the while studying how he may commence a suit against you, for your duty: like those that come to sermons, to carp or catch at what the preacher saith; or (as one saith) like a cunning opponent in the schools, while his adversary is busy, reading his position, he is studying to confute it; and, oh, what advantage do we often give Satan to trip us, and make us tardy? What occasion do we afford him to accuse us to God and to ourselves, while we have our filthy garments on us? Yea, remissness in our duties, brings decay in grace. Tradesmen may go behind-hand, by being careless in their dealings, as well as by being much out of their shops: alas! what sad decay is in our souls, for want of close and constant communion with God? We have very perverse hearts; we have much a-do with them; when we would do good, evil is present; it is our great sin we are so much out of order, even upon our knees. Satan sends his imps to haunt and torment us; he jogs our hand when we are to write a letter

to heaven in our prayers; so that we can scarce make sense of what we present to God: our thoughts are unfixed, ranging abroad (like a spaniel) to a thousand objects; so that sometimes we have lost ourselves, and know not where we are: oh! let us lament our vain and trifling spirits, in secret duties, and turn us unto God for help; as a servant, when the child he tends is troublesome, and will not be ruled by him, calls out to the father to come to him, who no sooner speaks the word, but all is whist with him. Our God can set in order our unruly spirits, only he will be called upon by earnest prayer.

Thus much for this use.

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## CHAP. V. SECT. I.

*The Third Use is—of Instruction.*

**M**Y next and main work is, to help us in the duty of closet-prayer, by propounding some helps and rules for our direction; which I shall reduce to these four heads:

1. Preparatives to it.
2. Essentials in it.
3. Circumstances about it.
4. Consequences upon it.

1. Look to your state and standing: if you be not real saints, you are not fit for this spiritual duty: your relation must be changed by converting grace: hence the text saith, *Pray to thy Father.*



*Father.* See then that God be your Father in Jesus Christ, else you cannot truly cry, *Abba, Father*: if we must be reconciled to our brother before we offer our gift, much more to God; for how can two walk together, except they be agreed? I deny not but a carnal soul should retire himself into a corner, examine his state, fall down on his knees, and beg converting and pardoning grace: and thus they must acquaint themselves with God, that they may come before him; for unsound unconverted sinners have no right (as children) to call on the King of heaven; though (as creatures) they may and must seek unto God, yet they worship afar off. It is the gracious Christian only that prayeth acceptably; wicked men's prayers are an abomination; an hypocrite shall not come before him, Job, xiii. 16. And, indeed, till you be real saints, you will have no mind to buckle close to this duty: truth of grace will capacitate you for secret approaches to God; strength of grace will elevate you to God; and evidence of sincerity will make you come boldly to the throne of grace: therefore try your state, enquire what relation you have to God, or else expect no familiarity with him. God will not take the wicked by the hand, to lead them into these chambers of communion; the throne of iniquity hath no fellowship with him. Our Lord Jesus marrieth none but widows, that are divorced from all other husbands; and he opens his heart to none but his betrothed Spouse; her he leads into a solitary place, and speaks to her heart. Oh, Sirs! come over clearly to God, by closing with Christ; renounce yourselves, get united to

him, and then come and welcome to enjoy communion with him in closet-prayer.

2. Dispatch other things off your hearts and hands: let not your earthly occasions intrude into your closet-exercises; say to the cares and affairs of the world, as Abraham to his servants, *Stay there, while I go and worship the Lord yonder*: or as Nehemiah in another case, *I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down unto you*. So do thou say, I have appointed other times and seasons for attending worldly business; let me alone with my God; every thing is beautiful in its season: communion with God is as much as I can attend at once; I must not be diverted by other objects; the business I am about is of the greatest importance; I must consult how I may attend upon the Lord without distraction, and worldly matters have distracted me in God's service, and have cost me many a tear; therefore get away from me. Why should the work of the Lord cease? Why should I be hindered from my God? What can you afford me that can be worth one hour's communion with my God? Thus do you actually renounce the world; for you cannot mind two things at once: and observe it, if you leave any matters of the world, tarrying for your attendance, the thoughts of them will attend you, and make you cut your duties short, and run away before your hearts be warmed: therefore, if it may be, dispatch them, however, rid your hearts of them. The Heathens left their shoes at the temple-doors, to shew that all earthly occasions and affections must be left behind when we go to God.

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Let vain or busy thoughts have there no part ;  
Bring not thy plough, thy plots, thy pleasures  
thither. ;

Christ purg'd his temple, so must thou thy heart:  
All worldly thoughts are but thieves met together,  
To couzen thee.— Herbert.

## S E C T. II.

*Two more Preparatives to secret Prayer.*

3. **S**ET yourself in God's presence: although you be not within the view of any mortal creature, yet the eternal God sees what you are a going about: so saith the text, *Your Father sees in secret*; darkness or closeness hides not from him; and it is more that one God sees you, than if all the men on earth gazed at you: his eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun; and he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; therefore wash your hands in innocency before you compass his altar: for if you regard iniquity in your heart, God will not hear your prayer, Hab. i. 13. Psal. xxvi. 6. Psal. lxvi. 18. Therefore set the Lord alway before you, especially now you are setting yourselves before the Lord; if that caveat was enough to beget reverence in an Heathen, "Cato sees thee;" oh what reverence would the sense of God's omnipresence beget in the heart, if duly weighed! Christians, weigh your spirits with such meditations as these, God's eye is never off me, I am daily walking in the sun; but now I am setting myself to pray in secret; I come to appear
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before God in a special manner; I may deceive men and myself, but God will not be mocked; I had need now engage my heart to approach unto God; that is the thing he looks for. Oh for a spirit suitable to such a majesty whom I come to worship! Lord, draw out my affections, unite my heart, excite my graces, that my whole soul may be carried after God: thus commit thy works to the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established, Psal. xxxvii. 5. Prov. xvi. 3. When thou art setting thy face towards a duty, where thou art sure to meet Satan, and carry with thee a corrupt deceitful heart, let God know from thy mouth whither thou art going, what thy fears are. Never (saith one) doth the soul march in so good order, as when it puts itself under the conduct of God; and never is it so awful, as when it sets itself under the eye of God, Gen. xvii. 1. *I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect.* When you sensibly discern you are kneeling before God, will not this make you perfect, sincere, and grow holier? If you think God be not in your closets, what do you go there to pray for? And if you know he sees you there, why do you not think so, and set yourselves as in his presence? The child will stand demurely before his father, the scholar before his master; and so will the gracious soul before God in duty, if sensible of his presence.

4. Muster up your thoughts and ways: our thoughts and affections are like the strings of an instrument out of tune, and therefore we must take some pains to wind and skruce them up. This is that which Zophar adviseth to, Job, xi. 13. to prepare the heart, and then stretch forth

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forth the hands: and for this end, it would not be amiss, when you come into a private room to pray in secret, first to read some portion of Scripture, which may be of use to compose your spirits; and like David's harp to Saul, drive away your wild imaginations: yea, the word read may afford you suitable matter of prayer to God. More particularly, let me add one experienced help, which is this: when you are addressing yourselves to God in secret prayer, endeavour to fix your thoughts upon some particular subject to enlarge upon; there is no question but you have sometimes one special errand to God, sometimes another, if you observe your condition well; be sure to mind that, whether it be to confess some predominant sin, to beg pardon of it, power against it: you may have in your eye some grace that you need more than ordinarily, and see your weakness and defect therein, &c. Now do not satisfy yourselves in running out into generals only, but set yourselves to plead the cause of your souls in that very case, which you have found out by serious inquiry, would most engage you at that time to go to God about; expatiate principally upon that subject: and this I conceive to be a taking to ourselves words (which the Holy Ghost directeth us to in prayer) Hos. xiv. 2. not a form of such and such phrases, but some special subject matter to speak to our God about; the word in Hebrew imports so much.

Now, an intent and earnest pursuit of such a special subject at the throne of grace, is of use in these two respects:

1. You will find it a help against distractions, wandrings, withdrawings from God; when you pur-

purposely set yourselves to mind one thing, you will be more intent upon it, and lay out more pains about it, than when you allow yourselves liberty in variety of matter. When the stream runs one way, it is stronger than dispersed into several channels; so, when the Christian unites his strength to plead with God about a particular business, he is usually more warm and affectionate, and so less subject to distraction.

2. It will help you to enlarge yourselves in spreading particular cases before the Lord, in pat and proper expressions, even before others, as you have a call and opportunity; and this is that which is called the gift of prayer, which is of singular use, when a person can particularly and pathetically lay open a condition, plead with God, improve promises, and rationally expostulate, even with the Almighty, about a spiritual or temporal concernment: this holy art is got by a frequency in secret prayer, and particularly pleading for a man's own soul: this is the last preparatory; think before-hand what business you have to God in a peculiar manner, and drive that nail, as it were, to the head: you cannot think to speak of all things to God at one time, but take that which is of present emergent use and importance, and set yourselves to enlarge upon that; follow that home till you feel your hearts be warmed and affected, and so have some tokens for good that God will return a sensible answer: you will say, Must we thus prepare ourselves before every duty of secret prayer; we have not time for it? I shall answer this in the words of my dear and reverend father Angier \*. There

\* His book, called *An Help to better Hearts for better Times*, p. 196, 197, read more of this subject.

are some separating duties that prepare for others, as examination, meditation, prayer; and they do prepare by stirring up the grace of God, and providing an heavenly assistance to begin with us in the duty: if thou canst not always have separating time betwixt other occasions and God's worship, yet have some separating thoughts ere you enter upon the duty; thou art not fit else to meddle with wisdom: thus he. It is true, some have not the leisure that others have; yet so much preparation is necessary for every duty, as may withdraw the heart from other objects, and weigh the spirit with a due sense of the work we have in hand; and sometimes this may be done suddenly; yet as for such as have more time to work upon their hearts, and state their soul's case, by mustering themselves to the work, neglect a duty, and cannot groundedly expect the Lord's presence: and this I conceive is the reason why the Lord's people miss of God in secret prayer, at least one reason is, because they do not make such conscience, and take such care of preparing their hearts as they ought: ah, Christians, when you come into your closet, sit down and pause a little, before you fall upon your knees; clear up your state, shake off other business, set yourselves in God's presence, and muster up your sins or wants, or mercies you propose to spread before the Lord; a client will consider all his matters before he comes to state his case to his advocate; a poor patient will bethink himself, how he is, that he may tell his ailings to his physician; and a petitioner will not go hand over head to his prince, but order his cause before-hand, that he may plead it more effectually:  
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and shall we not much more prepare ourselves to wait upon the God of heaven?

### S E C T. III.

*Directions concerning the Essentials of secret Prayer.*

2. **T**HE second sort of rules is concerning some things essentially requisite to the right performance of the duty of secret prayer, which you are to look to in the duty; and these are such as are required in all sorts of prayer; viz. that it be performed,

1. *With the heart.*
2. *By the help of the Spirit.*
3. *According to God's will.*
4. *In the name of Christ.*

1. Secret prayer must be hearty prayer: an heartless duty is a worthless duty; yea, the whole heart must be engaged in it, Psal. cxix. 10. *With my whole heart have I sought thee*: it is the heart that God chiefly looks after, Prov. xxiii. 26. *My son, give me thy heart*: nothing else can please God, if the heart be wanting; if the heart be engaged in the duty, he will rather dispense with other weakneses, where there is not wilful negligence: observe it, in that worship of God we perform with others, a man's gifts may be of use, though his heart go not along with his voice; but in closet-prayer it doth no good at all, except the heart be engaged; therefore God principally requires the heart in other duties; in this he only



requires the heart, for the voice is not necessary : to love and serve the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, strength, is a keeping of the law, and more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices, Mark, xii. 30. 33. we should pray with every faculty of the soul, and with the utmost strength of every faculty, Matt. xv. 8, 9. God deserves and requires our strongest affections : that is but a vain worship that is performed without the heart : right attendance on God is an engaging the heart to approach to God ; Jer. xxx. 21. Christians, in all your addresses to God, mind the object of worship ; let the subject, worshipping, and object worshipped, be closely united ; look beyond the duty : it is one thing to have communion with an ordinance, and another thing to have communion with God in an ordinance. God's dear children know what this means ; for sometimes they are more taken up with expressions, affections, or some accidentals in the performance, than with the object of worship they should be intent upon : but this is very dangerous ; for whatsoever interposeth betwixt the soul and God, to divert the thoughts from God, is an idol, Ezek. xiv. 3. *These men have set up their idols in their hearts.* Sept. reads it, *They have put their thoughts upon their hearts, i. e.* They have committed idolatry with their own imaginations : instead of worshipping God, their minds have stuck upon something short of God, after which they have (as it were) run a whoring even in the duty. I shall not deliver that as the sense of the place, yet it may be an useful note : here many of us are guilty of a kind of spiritual fine-spun idolatry, by heterogeneous thoughts in  
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holy duties, that pluck us from God, when we are approaching to him. The Lord humble us for this, and fix our thoughts upon God, that we may say as the church, Isa. xxvi. 8. *The desire of our souls is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.* Cyprian saith, Every secular thought must depart, and the mind must be taken up with nothing but what we are about: he tells the practice of the church in his time was, that the minister, before prayer, prepares the people's minds, saying, Lift up your hearts; and they answer, We have them up to the Lord: Whereby, saith he, we are admonished, that in prayer we must think of nothing but the Lord. What the minister said to the people, do you say to yourselves; Lift up your hearts: let every one say, I am now worshipping an heart-searching God, oh that my heart were with God. The ancients, saith Luther, finely described prayer to be an ascent of the mind to God: oh that I did experimentally know, what this means in syntaxi, *i. e.* in coupling and joining of my heart to God. Lord, gather in my roving and wandering spirit: this is the first direction, *mind the frame of your hearts.*

2. Implore or expect the Spirit's assistance: prayer must be by the Spirit's enlarging influence; hence it is called the Spirit of grace and supplication, Zech. xii. 10. it helps our infirmities, by making our souls to cry out, Abba, Father, with unutterable groans, Rom. viii. 26. A Christian should spread the sails of his soul for the gales of God's grace, which will carry the praying saint apace towards God, yea, and reach the ear of God, for he knoweth the mind of the Spirit: this

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this is that which is called, a worshipping God in the Spirit; a praying in the Holy Ghost, Phil. iii. 3. Jude, 20. *i. e.* either as to the matter of the prayer dictated by the Spirit, or as to the manner of praying, the soul being actuated by the Holy Ghost: for I conceive it may import the former as well as the latter, as other Scriptures compared hold forth, Mark, xii. 36. and xiii. 11. Alas, flesh and blood will put up such petitions as God will not accept, or in such a manner as is no way suitable to his spiritual nature: the truth is, Christians, you will but bungle at the work, without the help of God's Spirit, and God will not take notice of you, except he hear his own language: do not think you can wrestle out the business yourselves; you must be beholden to God for help in prayer, as well as for hearing your prayer; your own spirits will not carry you to heaven; that which is from the earth is earthly, and riseth no higher than earth, but the Holy Ghost will elevate your souls to God: therefore, I beseech you, Sirs, beg the Spirit, yield to its motions, improve its operations; say, when you are going to duty, Lord, now stir up thyself, and stir up thy grace in my heart: *Awake, O north wind, and come thou south; blow upon thy garden, [my soul]* Cant. iv. 16. that the spices thereof may flow out [that graces may be exercised and exerted]: Lord, I am low, flat, hard; send the powerful arm of thy blessed Spirit, to work all gracious dispositions in me, and raise up my affections to thee: I see I am below the duty, and infinitely below thee in the duty; but thou, and thou alone canst raise me up, quicken, soften my dead and rocky heart;

come, Lord, and shew thy powerful arm; let it appear what God can do for a sorry worm. Oh lift me up to thee, that my soul may enjoy some sweet communion with thee: send thy Spirit to fetch in my wanton wandering heart: oh for some fire from heaven to burn up my sacrifice, or else it will lie like a lump of flesh, and be no true Holocaust of pure incense before thee: lest thy Spirit scatter these mists of ignorance, and drive these flies of distracting thoughts, that my heart may be with thee, and my performance may be a sweet savour in the nostrils of God.

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#### S E C T. IV.

##### *More Essentials in secret Prayer.*

**A** Third ingredient in prayer is, that it be according to God's will; it must have a warrant from the word; a word of precept, or promise, or example, must be the ground of our petitions: a command is our warrant, a promise our encouragement; an example is our tract, and the footsteps of the flock wherein we must walk: he that asks amiss shall not speed, but if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and then we know we have the petitions that we desired of him, 1 John, v. 14, 15. Now, we ask according to his will, when both the matter of our petition is right, and our end in asking is God's glory, and our own or others spiritual good: otherwise, if we ask of God what we conceit to be a mercy, and have not asked

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counsel at God's mouth; or ask so as to consume it upon our lusts, we may well meet with a denial: my friends, you may not say what you please in the presence of God. Consider, *God is in heaven, you are on earth, therefore be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; let your words be few and well weighed*, Eccles. v. 2. The work you are about is a solemn business, do not ramble in extravagant desires of unlawful things; think not that God will patronize your lusts: and when you have asked that which you conceive is according to his will, refer it wholly to his will; say, *The will of the Lord be done*: submit yourselves to his dispose, for time, manner, means, and all circumstances for giving of it: ask temporal mercies conditionally, and spiritual comforts with submission to God's will; learn that petition, *Thy will be done*, to pray it as well as say it. Indeed Luther could say "Let my will be done," but he came off with this, "My will, Lord, because my will is melted into thine; there is but one will betwixt us:" let God's will be your will; it is fit it should be so: our heavenly Father is wiser than we: consider, a man cannot pray in faith, for that which he hath no warrant to ask: besides, Amesius saith, "If a man come not with an humble submission to God's will, it were not a religious prayer directed to the supreme Creator, but a kind of command by a superior to an inferior, or familiar discourse as amongst equals." Therefore let us humbly plead God's will, as Abraham did, Gen. xviii. 27. Further, consider, the design of prayer is not to incline God,

before unwilling, to our mind and desire; for with him there is no variableness, nor shadow of change; but that we may obtain of him by prayer what we know afore-hand he is willing to give: *Lastly*, consider we Christ's example, Mat. xxvi. 39. *If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt*: this is right praying, to ground our petition upon a promise, yet freely to leave all at God's feet, to dispose of us as he sees good: this is the third direction; let your prayers be warranted by the word.

4. Improve your Advocate, John, xiv. 13. *Whatsoever you ask in my name, that will I do*: to ask any thing in his name, is not rudely, customarily, or complementally, to conclude with these words, "Through Jesus Christ our Lord," &c. but, in confidence of his merit and intercession, to call upon our heavenly Father, as Daniel pleads, *for the Lord's sake*, Dan. ix. 17. For, since the fall, none can come immediately to God, but through a Mediator; nor are we to fetch a compass, by the groundless invocation of saints and angels: I hope you have otherwise learned Christ. I am most afraid, in the practical part, that, in particular acts (at least), precious souls are in danger to miscarry, especially in closet-prayer: when a Christian is got alone, and there finds a sweet gale of the blessed Spirit, helping his heart to mourn for sin, bewail his misery, plead for mercy, and giving God the glory due unto his name; oh, then he goes away much satisfied; and God must needs accept his person, and hear his prayer: why so? why, he hath found abundant assistance, meltings, quick-

quicknings, and enlargements: alas! Sirs, where is Christ all this while? I am afraid your Advocate is quite forgotten, your Surety set aside as a poor insignificant cypher: and tell me, soul, thou that boastest thus of thy enlargements, darest thou appear before an holy God in these rotten rags? suppose thy rags be velvet, they are but rags still, and are too scant a garment for thy naked soul; thou comest to unlock the ear of God, and open his heart with a wrong key: we are accepted only in the beloved, and not because we are enlarged: it is true, evangelical assistance may be a sign of acceptance, but it is no cause thereof: no, no, our persons and prayers are owned only upon the account of our Surety and Intercessor: our dear Lord Jesus, who died for us, he sits in the court of heaven as our Advocate, to plead for us; and shall we not employ our Advocate, and find him work? Or shall we think to go on our own errand? Lord, forgive this gross ingratitude: oh, Christians, whatever your straitness or enlargements be, make use of him who is at God's right-hand, lay your sacrifices on this golden altar; lay the whole stress of your acceptance upon Christ's meritorious intercession; act faith on him who mingles his sweet incense with your sorry performances: oh look after our Aaron, who is gone into the holy of holies for us: consider, friends, it would be sad with you, if you were to be judged according to the best secret duties that ever you performed: it is good to have an enlarged heart in secret, yet there is danger in it, and it may undo us, because our naughty hearts are apt to boast of, and trust to our enlargements; therefore it is

better for us sometimes to be straitened, than constantly enlarged in our closet-prayers: this is that which hath made some say, that their duties have done them more hurt than their infirmities; and the reason is plain, because our corrupt hearts are so apt to depend upon the former, whenas we are daunted and emptied of ourselves by considering the latter: the Lord help us all in this main business of prayer, yea, this principal part of our religion, to depend wholly upon the righteousness and intercession of Jesus Christ, for access to, and acceptance with God: study these Scriptures, John, xvi. 23, 24. Eph. iii. 13. Heb. iv. 15, 16. x. 19, 20, 21, 22. Phil. iii. 3. 18. The gospel is full of this; yea, this is the main hinge of our religion: you are not Christians, unless you make Jehovah your righteousness in all you do, as well as God your ultimate end: you will go away as the proud Pharisee without acceptance, if you plead your enlargements with God: but if you come as the Publican, pleading only God's mercy, and Christ's merits, you shall be owned and crowned with abundant incomes.

There are also several other necessary ingredients in all prayer, which I might urge with reference to this duty of secret prayer, as 1. A right understanding, 1 Cor. xiv. 15. *I will pray with the understanding*: for blind devotion is not pleasing to God. 2. A sensible feeling of our wants; we must come weary and heavy laden. Mat. xi. 28. Pressed with the guilt of sin; pinched with want of grace. 3. Fervency of Spirit, James, v. 17. arising from a consideration of the necessity and excellency of what we desire;  
burning



burning zeal. 4. A reverent disposition, Ecclef. v. 2. an unfeigned abasing of ourselves before him, from the sense of his infinite majesty, and our own indignity. 5. Secret perswasions of prevailing, 1 Tim. ii. 8. grounded on God's all-sufficiency and fidelity, though the soul be unworthy. 6. A charitable disposition, forgiving others, Mat. vi. 14. bearing an endeared affection to all saints. 7. Perseverance in prayer, holding on without cessation, Eph. vi. 18. Following God in the duty all our days: such as these constitutive ingredients, essentially requisite in the duty of prayer, I might urge, but must contract.

This is the second sort of directions.

## C H A P. VI. S E C T. I.

### *The Circumstances of Secret Prayer opened.*

**T**H E third head of instructions concerning closet-prayer, is the circumstances that attend it, which may be a great furtherance or hindrance in this performance. These are four. Referring either, 1. To the place. 2. Posture. 3. Season. 4. Voice.

I shall but briefly touch at these.

1. For the place; I advise you to choose the most retired room, where you may be freest from disturbance, that you may not hear the noise of the family, or distracting commotions of a tumultuous world: be not curious in the choice of a place, so it accomplish your end for secrecy or retirement; no matter how homely it be,

be, the sweetness of the company will compensate the meanness of the place; lovers care not where they meet, so they may conveniently be together: if you have not a convenient room within doors, yet a good heart will not disdain to go meet its beloved in any cot, or barn, or wood: Isaac walked out into the fields to pray and meditate: see you choose a private place, wherever it be, according to the nature of the duty, before opened to you; observe God's providence in disposing of you, and accept such place as he shall offer to you.

2. For posture; in general, see that you use an humble gesture; there are examples of several laudable gestures in prayer; sometimes we find saints standing, ordinarily kneeling, spreading forth their hands, lifting up their eyes towards heaven, sometimes prostrating the body all along upon the earth before the Lord; you may do in this as you find most advantageous in your experience: no universal rules can be given as to these particular circumstances: only see that your closet prayers be with as much reverence as if you were before others: consider, your bodies are God's, and must be presented as a sacrifice to God: he will be worshipped with the outward as well as with the inward man; you cannot, without dangerous sacrilege, rob him of either: besides, observe it, there is both evidence and assistance in the body's humble gesture; it is an help to make you humble, and it is a sign that you are humble: but, on the contrary, an unsuitable site and position of the body in God's service, is a sad sign of an unhumbled soul, and hinders humi-

humiliation: therefore, though you be never so solitary, yet remember, your Father in heaven sees you. Therefore (as Cyprian exhorts) let us consider we stand under the presence of God, and seek to please the divine eyes, both in the habit of our body, and manner of our voice: think of this rule.

3. For the season. The apostle saith, *Pray continually, or without ceasing*; yet there are some (as it were) canonical hours of prayer, wherein a Christian's discretion must interpose: only, in this case, take the fittest seasons for secret prayer; as when you are most at leisure from worldly business, most free from company, least in danger of drowsiness: oh, Christians, if it be possible, put not off your secret devotions too long, till you go to bed; then you are fitter for rest and sleep, than for wrestling with God on your knees. And then for the frequency, no certain rule can be given: David and Daniel *prayed three times a day, morning, noon, and night*: noon time was the sixth hour, which was also a time of prayer, (Acts, x. 9.) others also observed the ninth hour, which was three a clock in the afternoon, (Acts, iii. 1.) Certainly the third hour, *i. e.* nine in the morning, was an hour of prayer, (Acts, ii. 15.) and so was evening, six at night, say some. David adds a seventh in Psal, cxix. 164. *Seven times a day will I praise thee*, which may only denote frequency in the duty. Some of these may seem extraordinary cases: the ordinary seasons the saints have taken, have been morning and evening, according to the Jews sacrifice of a lamb at those seasons, Exod. xxix. 38, 39. Psal. v. 3. lxxxviii.

13. and cxli. 2. In the morning our spirits are fresh and lively: at evening we may find the by-past matters of the day a fit occasion for prayer and praise: it would do well to take Isaac's season for devotion, even about sun-set, or the shutting in of the day; but I shall not too peremptorily impose in these undetermined circumstances, only take that general rule, 1 Pet. iv. 7. *Watch unto prayer.* That is the third.

4. For the voice; the articulate sound of words is not absolutely necessary in prayer, and it may be not so convenient in closet-prayer; which should be managed privately betwixt God and a man's soul, approving the heart to God as sole witness of his sincerity; except through some extasy and strong motion of the affections, the soul's desires break out in the lips beyond its first intentions. I know Mr. John Carter, that eminent man of God, did purposely use his voice in secret prayer for these two reasons.

1. Because he found it an help to his affections.
2. Because it was an example to his family: I must not therefore lay any necessity in these variable circumstances; only I humbly conceive, it is most suitable to the nature of closet-prayer, to perform it so as none else may take notice thereof. Give me leave to mention a few passages out of Cyprian to this purpose: "It is a token of unmannerly impudence, to make a noise with loud clamours; but it is most suitable to a modest spirit, to pray with silent groans. For God is the hearer, not of the voice, but of the heart: he makes Hannah a type of the church, who prayed not with clamorous petitions, but with working affections within the lurking holes (as



(as it were) of her breast; she spake with hidden prayer, but manifest faith."

Thus much for circumstances of closet-prayer, wherein I am more short and shy in imposing any thing on the people of God, which God hath left free in his word: only in general take notice, that though accidental circumstances that concerns duty be mutable, yet by the wise ordering of those circumstances, they will become singular helps in the managing of a duty.

## S E C T. II.

### *Duties concomitant to Closet-prayer.*

4. **T**HE last sort of duties and directions, concerning closet-prayer, are such as are to be practised after the duty is performed, which I call consequent, or concomitant duties. These are four, *viz.*

1. Observing God's appearances.
2. Walking suitably.
3. Waiting for returns.
4. Communicating experiences.

1. When you have been before the Lord in closet-prayer, observe how God hath been dealing with your hearts, that you may be suitably disposed and affected: if the Lord hath withdrawn himself from you, left you under hardness, deadness, distraction, uncomfortableness; you are to mourn for it, enquire the cause of it, reflect upon yourselves, see what guilt there is  
upon

upon conscience, which separates betwixt God and your souls: and then (if time permit) fall to it again, lament the sin; be ingenuous in confessions, make stronger resolutions, remove all obstructions, that God and your souls may not be at any distance; reckon streight, and make up your accounts; part friends, that you may meet friends the next time you go to him: if you find that God hath helped, melted, and graciously manifested himself to your souls, take special notice of it; record that for time to come; flight not the least appearances of God, own him in, praise him for these sweet manifestations of his love: learn this lesson, even of Hagar the bond-woman: when she was in a solitary wilderness, the angel of the Lord comforts her; tells her God hath heard her affliction; she was with child; her seed should be multiplied: she in an answerable return to God for his kindness, sets an asterism of observation upon the place, as a memorial of God's seeing, and looking after her; *So the well was called Beer-lahai-roi*, i. e. the well of him that liveth, and seeth me, Gen. xvi. 13, 14. Thus do you: think and think again, Oh, who, or what am I, that God should look after me, or take notice of me in this desolate state and place! I shall remember this time of love whilst I live; in such a room I met with God, such a chamber or closet was a Bethel, a mount Nebo, a sycamore tree, where I beheld my Jesus, and took a blessed view of the promised land.—Thus, Christians, reflect upon, and recollect your experiences in God's presence; which may be of use unto you all your days.

2. Let

2. Let your carriages at all times be fuitable to your closet-prayer; let it appear that you are wholly devoted to God: cross not your prayers with your practices: pray much, and live well: let it appear you have been with God, that you have been drawing your influences from the Spring-head; walk with men as those that walk with God: let the smell and flavour of your heavenly conversings break forth in your gracious expressions, and exemplary conversations: live not after the ordinary rate of professors: as your heart is God-wards, so let your light be men-wards, that they may see your good works, and glorify God: carry something out of your closets, that may hold forth the word of life and work of grace, be able to say in words what David speaks in words, Psal. cxix. 55, 56. After he had said, *He remembered God's name in the night*, he adds, *This I had, because I kept thy precepts*: he tells not what it was, but certainly something it was, worth having: possibly it was some strength to obey the will of God, some power over a corruption: oh, Christians, let your actions demonstrate what you get in God's presence: what a sin and shame is it, when persons do that morally that Moses did literally, even come down from the mount, and break the tables of God's law, as soon as they are off the place? Oh how sad is it for a soul to come down from closet-prayer, and be proud, passionate, envious, or covetous? And observe it; then you are most in danger: for then doth Satan tempt most, and your hearts are then most apt to be secure, conceited, and carnally confident, as though you had done enough, and might

now sit down and take your ease : and having sweat at duty, and suddenly cooling, the gracious soul doth contract a dangerous surfeit, and fall into a languishing condition : be jealous, therefore, of yourselves when you have been with God in secret, and have an eye upon the devil, who is like a cheater who strikes in with a young heir, when he hath newly received his rents, and never leaves him till he hath eased him of his money : oh now walk warily and watchfully ; consider where you have been, and do nothing contrary to your communion or profession : let it never be said of you as some are apt to say, I wonder what such persons do so much alone ! unless they lived better, and carried themselves after another order : they pretend devotion, but there is little seen in their conversation ; they will talk as vainly, live as wantonly, be as hard and false in their way of trading, and be as proud, scornful, perfidious, and injurious as others are : ah ! Christians, let it never be said thus ; at least give no occasion of such speeches : let the world see, your prayers have some efficacy ; that you get some strength in duties which you lay out in your practices.

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### S E C T. III.

#### *Further Duties after Closet-Prayer.*

3. **A** Nother duty after you have been with God in secret is, to expect a seasonable return : stand upon your watch, hearken what God will speak : *Unto thee*, saith David, *will I direct*



*direct my prayer, and will look up*, Psal. v. 3. So do you: Christians, look up to see what becomes of your prayers; observe what answers God gives in. It is an unmannerly mocking another, (Pilate-like) to ask a question, and expect no answer: and is not this a gross solecism in religion, to speak many things to God, and expect no return? it is certainly a great fault among Christians, to pray and pray, and never to consider or gather up the fruits of prayer: is it not a strange piece of folly, for men to be always sowing, and never to look for an harvest? Surely Christians have more harvests than they are aware of: therefore, Sirs, observe how you reap; take special notice of any thing that looks like a return of prayer; examine it thoroughly, gather something out of it, catch at what comes from the King of heaven, as Benhadad's servants did by the king of Israel's words; and if there be but an hint, lay it up, make much of it, improve it, praise God for it, and hope for more: it is the negligence, or unwarrantable modesty of some Christians, to think that they can expect no fruit of their prayers, because of the imperfection of their duties, forgetting God's gracious promise to upright-hearted seekers, by remembring his strict justice to such as seek him not in the due order: but, Sirs, you must so be humble, as also to believe, so deny your own righteousness, as also to improve Christ's intercession; you are to renounce all conceits of merit in yourselves, and yet look up for mercy from God. God hath graciously annexed his promise of acceptance to the performance of the condition; and if God have assisted you to pray

right for the main, you may expect his audience : for God is faithful and merciful, both in forgiving our iniquities, and giving us mercies, 1 John, i. 9. 2 Tim. iv. 8. God's answers are larger than our askings : instances of this sort are endless : there is never a sincere prayer lost ; God always gives in returns, only we either do not observe, or mistake them, and lose the comfort of them : an answer of prayer doth not always come in the way we expect it ; we look for it at the fore-door, and it comes in at the back-door ; and while we are still expecting the friend we look for, he is in the house ; the mercy we desired is received, only it comes in a way we thought not of, and are therefore apt to overlook it : therefore take heed of confining God to your way, or limiting him to your time : that is the third.

4. Communicate your experiments : and thereby commend this duty to others : thus David, *Come, saith he, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul* : Psal lxvi. 16. *This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him*, Psal xxxiv. 6 Do you as I have done, and you shall speed as I have sped. Do not mistake this : I would not have you tell every one when you go to closet-prayer, or when you have been at it (that is a Pharisaical blowing a trumpet), but you must, at sometimes, to such persons as you can confide in, or that you have some grounded hopes of doing good to, tell them your experiences, for their direction and encouragement ; in this case, acquaint them how God is wont to deal with your hearts, what good you have found from God in that duty, and you question not but  
upon

upon a conscientious use thereof they may find the like advantage: and this would be of singular use; for hereby they have not only a rule for it, but the exemplifying of it in a precedent; and we know examples are of a prevailing nature. Especially, see that you put your families upon this practice; oh what a blessed thing were it, if every person, in several rooms of the house, were at work with God in secret prayer! how bravely would that house be perfumed? How well would the trade of godliness thrive? surely such an house were a more blessed beautiful edifice than any princes palace under heaven: it is the disposition of gospel penitents to mourn every family apart, husbands and wives apart, Zech. xii. 11, 12. and of gracious souls, *to be like doves of the valleys, every one mourning for his iniquity*, Ezek. vii. 16. There must be joint-prayer and separated prayers together and apart: let not Christians be content to find Christ in a corner for themselves; but let them do what they can, that others also may enjoy him: this was the frame of the church, or believing soul, Cant. iii. When she had found him, *I held him, faith she, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house*, i. e. into more public assemblies: and truly, Christians, that man hath not found Christ at all, that would not have all others to find him. Oh, thinks the Christian, in his retirement, that others did but feel and enjoy what my soul hath sweet experience of; would to God my husband, wife, brother, father, child, neighbour, would but try this course a while! Oh what advantage would they get by it? Though I eat these sweet morsels alone,

yet fain would I have others to partake with me : in things of this world, persons are apt to grudge others any benefit by what they have stolen from others ; but in spiritual advantages, there is no envy ; and if there be, it proceeds not from grace, but from corrupt nature ; the more grace, the less envy ; and when envy is gone, persons will be communicative. Take away envy, and mine is thine, and thine is mine ; true grace or *charity is kind, envieth not*, 1 Cor. xiii. 14. Now, this I am persuading to, that they that have found Christ, would be so charitable to souls, as to communicate the knowledge of him, and the way to enjoy him, unto others : thus doth Andrew come to Simon, and Philip to Nathaniel ; and both of them were (as a man finding a jewel, and cannot contain) over-joyed, and cry out, “ I have found him ; ” *We have found the Messiah*, John, i. 41. 45. And when the poor woman of Samaria had been privately conversing with Jesus, down she threw (at least left behind her) her water-pot, *and (all in haste) went to the city, and said to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did ; is not this the Christ ?* John, iv. 28, 29. Thus do you, Sirs : promote and propagate this choice duty ; commend it unto others practice ; and so you may be instruments of good.

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## CHAP. VII. SECT. I.

### *Concerning the Matter or Words of Prayer.*

**T**HERE is one thing yet remains, which it may be expected something should be spoken to ; and that is, the matter in praying,

or



or words of prayer; whether it be lawful or requisite to use a form or no? Most judge, that as forms are lawful, so prescript words may be requisite to some young beginners in religion, and other Christians of weak parts, that cannot express their desires to God in fit words, to help their rudeness; yet Christians ought to press after more growth and proficiency, that they may lay aside those crutches, and arrive at the gift of prayer; that may be of singular use. As for closet-prayer, Dr. Hammond doth assert it, [Practical Catech. page 277.] that every one may ask his own wants, in what form of words he shall think fit: and, indeed, all particular cases, incident and variable, can scarce be comprehended in one constant form: besides, in secret prayer, God doth not so much stand upon phrases, or pat sentences, as the workings of the heart in sighs and groans, which are the best rhetoric in his ears. It is enquired, Whether we may use the Lord's prayer? I answer, We may use it as other prayers in Scripture, either in the very words, or as an example, platform, or directory, according to the contents whereof we must direct our prayers.

Therefore, for the further help of young professors, I shall briefly touch at the several branches of that admirable compendious rule of prayer you have in Matt. vi. 9. to 14. And the rather, because it may seem to refer chiefly (though not only) to closet-devotion: what I shall say to it, may be a practical analysing of it in its several parts and branches.

1. For the preface, [*Our Father which art in heaven,*] you may thus make use of it: "Infinite

nite and eternal Majesty, the Maker of heaven and earth, who dwellest in the highest heavens, and in the lowest hearts; who seest all things here below; and art a God that hearest prayers; I am a poor worm at thy foot-stool, looking up to the throne of thy grace; cast a fatherly eye upon me; and though I be by nature a child of wrath, yet, through Jesus Christ, make me thy child by grace and adoption; teach me to cry, Abba, Father, with holy reverence, and filial confidence; raise my heart to heaven, beget in me faith in thy promises, love to my brethren, and due apprehensions of thy sovereign power, and gracious condescension; that praying by the help of thy Spirit, in the name of thy Son, I may obtain good at thy Fatherly hands."

Secondly, For the petitions.

1. Petition, [*Hallowed be thy name,*] Thus, "O my God, I have dishonoured thee all my days, by ignorance, pride, hardness, and unthankfulness; and I am unapt and unable to glorify thee; but do thou glorify thyself in my conversion and salvation: help me to know and adore thee, to make an high account of thy titles, attributes, ordinances; to believe thy word, admire thy works, in mercy or judgment: help me with spiritual thoughts becoming my holy profession, with divine lips speaking good of thy name, and a suitable conversation, to walk before the Lord: holy God, destroy atheism, ignorance, idolatry, and profaneness; magnify thy name through the world; and direct and dispose all things to the advancement of thy glory, by thy over-ruling providence, and thy infinite wisdom."

2. Peti-

2. Petition, [*Thy kingdom come :*] Thus improve it ; “ Lord, I must confess, that by nature I am dead in sin, and a bond-slave to the prince of darkness, who rules in my heart, and leads me captive by ignorance, error, disobedience ; but do thou, by the power of thy grace, cast out the strong man ; take possession of my heart ; sway thy blessed sceptre in me ; bring my whole man to obedience ; destroy Satan’s kingdom ; propogate the gospel among all nations ; purge thy house ; furnish thy church with officers, orders, and pure ordinances ; make kings nursing fathers to it, convert sinners, confirm saints, comfort the sad, hasten thy second coming to judgment, and the blessed kingdom of glory.”

3. Petition, [*Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven :*] Thus, “ Holy majesty, I acknowledge my natural ignorance of thy will, impotency to obey it ; yea, enmity and antipathy against it : my best services are imperfect ; my spirit repining under thy hand ; and my will wilfully resisting grace, and rushing into sin ; but, dear Lord, inform my mind, conquer my will, order my affections sweetly to comply with thy mind ; teach me to do thy will in obedience ; make me content with thy will concerning me, in every providence ; beget in me those heavenly dispositions that are in the glorious angels, and glorified saints, that with humility, chearfulness, diligence and faithfulness, zeal, sincerity and constancy, I may be actively and passively at thy dispose.”

4. For that petition, [*Give us this day our daily bread ;*] Say in this manner ; “ Heavenly Father, I must confess that by my wretched apostasy in Adam,

Adam, I have lost my right to every morsel of bread, and deserve not to breathe in thy air, or tread on thy earth; my sin hath put a curse and sting into every comfort; I can obtain nothing by my industry, yet am prone to desire, get, and use thy mercies unlawfully; thy blessing is only the staff of my bread; help me to wait on thy providence in a moderate use of lawful means; give me a competence of outward comforts, thy blessing in the use thereof, and contentment therewith; and, above all, a right thereto in Christ, and prevent needless cares and sensual delights."

5. As to that petition, [*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*] Thus plead it; "Lord, I am wofully guilty of original and actual sin, and am thereby a debtor to divine justice: I owe millions, and cannot pay the least farthing, therefore deserve to be cast into the dark dungeon of eternal torments; but, dear Lord, thou hast found a ransom, who stands in man's stead, to be surety for him; O accept me in thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, wash away my sins in his blood, cloath my naked soul with his glorious robes, give me saving faith to embrace him upon his own terms, free my soul from guilt and punishment of sin, pardon my daily failings, and seal an acquittance in my conscience, which tells me I do freely forgive all offences against myself."

6. The last petition, [*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,*] you may render thus; "Lord, it were righteous with thee to leave me to be assaulted and conquered by Satan, my soul's cruel enemy; my heart is growing wanton, proud, and careless, apt to thrust myself  
into



into temptations, but unable to resist or overcome them: thou mayest justly bring me into occasions, and leave me to myself therein; but oh my God, keep my soul from being tempted, or assist me in the hour of temptation, or recover me out of my foils and falls, sanctify my slips, make my standing surer in thy strength, tread Satan under my feet, conquer the world for me, crucify me unto the world, subdue my flesh within, and in due time take my soul above all sins and snares, into thy immediate presence."

And then shut up all with such like words as these, on that conclusion, [*For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen:*] "Oh my God, I am unworthy thou shouldest grant my petitions for any thing in myself; all my arguments in prayer, and grounds of acceptance I fetch from thyself: thou hast a kingdom of grace, and throne of grace, from whence thou hearest prayers, and dispensest blessings; all the power is in thine hands, to give and forgive, to kill or make alive; and the glory shall be thine, if thou hear my prayer: and blessed be my God for all his mercies. I ascribe to thee, and thee alone, eternal sovereignty, omnipotency, and glorious excellency, which as I desire all may be given to God, so I am humbly emboldened by faith to rest upon thy power and promise, that in due time thou wilt hear my requests; and as a token of that my desire and confidence, my soul doth echo forth, Amen, even so be it."

Thus I have given you an hint from the Lord's Prayer of directions for the matter of our prayers. I shall but propound another Scripture instance concerning arguments in prayer.

## S E C T. II.

*An Example, from Jacob, of pleading with God.*

**G**OD would have his people converse with him in a rational way ; and God's children have made use of many pleas in prayer, which they have produced in vehement expostulations, as we may find sprinkled up and down in Scripture, as Moses, Nehemiah, Ezra, and Daniel, in their approaches to God : and above all, David through the book of Psalms is exceeding full this way. But I shall pass by the rest, and fix only upon one Scripture instance, and the rather, because it was a secret or solitary prayer (of which we are now speaking) : and there are notable pleas therein, which may possibly suit our condition ; therefore I shall briefly touch the parts of it, and recommend it to our imitation : it is that of good Jacob (who was trained up in this holy art of wrestling with God) in Gen. xxxii. 9, 10, 11, 12. His pleas there, may be reduced to these ten heads.

1. He makes use of suitable titles of God ; he calls him Lord, or Jehovah ; which denotes God's self-existence, and giving being or existence to the promises, in first making them, and then making them good. Thus do you ; Sirs, raise in your hearts suitable apprehensions of God, and let your expressions be answerable ; tell God, he is an infinite, omniscient, omnipotent majesty ; able to do beyond what you can ask or think ; and that you neither need nor desire any more than what his almighty power can

can effect: tell him, if all-sufficiency cannot supply you, you are content to go unsped; but you question neither his hand nor heart; you are sure he both can and will help his children in their need; he will make good with his hand, what he hath spoken with his mouth; for he is Jehovah.

2. He pleads covenant-relation to God: *O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac,* and so my God! This is an admirable plea, if God own a soul in a covenant-relation, he will certainly do it good; though his grace be free, yet when God hath chosen a soul to be his, he hath (as it were) engaged himself to own it; now he hath laid his truth to pledge. Thus, then, a soul may plead, "Lord, thou hast been my father's God, and wilt thou not be my God? And wilt thou be my God, and withhold such a mercy from me? My ancestors found grace in thy sight, and obtained those very good things I am craving; and am not I under the very same covenant with them? Are not promises the same? Is there not the same Mediator? Lord, I come to thee in a covenant-relation, for a covenant mercy, and wilt thou deny me?"

3. He pleads a warrant for his undertaking, appealing to God that he was in his way, saying, *The Lord, which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country:* oh with what encouragement may the soul plead for assistance and protection, that is in God's way and work, according to his own appointment? Thus then plead, "Lord, hast not thou set me about this work? Hast thou not given me a charge to do what I do? Have I not a plain positive Scripture-warrant to bind  
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my conscience? I dare not do otherwise: I may say, If I be deceived, thou hast deceived me; but I am sure, plain texts are no cheats, I cannot otherwise understand such a command: and oh, my God, since thou hast thus engaged me in thy work, wilt thou suffer me to miscarry therein?"

4. He pleads a particular promise, *I will deal well with thee*: surely a comprehensive word, containing in it all that Jacob wanted. Thus must a Christian search the Scriptures, get hold of a promise, spread it before the Lord, whether for spiritual grace, inward comfort, or outward supply; as thus: "Lord, I find a promise in such a place, to a person in my very case, pat and pertinent to my very condition, as if it had been calculated purposely for me in this juncture: now, Lord, make it good to my soul and seed; thou hast made it good to others in my state, and why not to me? am not I an heir of promise? and must not I have a share therein?"

5. Jacob lays himself under the sense of his own unworthiness, *I am not worthy*, saith he, *of the least of all thy mercies*. This is the property and excellency of a saint; to nullify himself, and omnify God, as I may so say: thus Abraham, in his pleading, calls himself dust and ashes; and the Centurion judged himself not worthy that Christ should come under his roof. Thus then abase thyself; "Lord, I am not worthy to enjoy any common mercy, nor fit to lift up mine eyes to thee; less than the least of thy mercies: behold, I am vile, I am not only destitute of merits, but full of demerits. Hell is my  
desert;



desert; I can challenge nothing as mine but sin, and the fruits thereof; Lord, I condemn myself, do not thou condemn me, and cast me from thee."

6. He is affected with God's faithfulness in the performance of his promises; acknowledging the truth of God shewed to his servant. There is mercy in God's making a promise to Abraham, Micah, vii. 20. truth in making it good to Jacob. Well, then, with Jacob thus plead: "Lord, it is true, there was nothing of desert in me to engage thee, either to make or keep thy gracious promise, but sure, the word is gone from thee, yea, and notwithstanding all my treachery and unfaithfulness, thou hast kept it to this day: oh keep it still; it depends wholly on thee: let not my vanity alter the course of thy mercy, but pardon and accept, as thou hast done from my Egyptian state until now."

7. Jacob further recounts his former meanness, his low condition: *with my staff I passed over this Jordan*; I came hither in a poor contemptible manner, a sorry pilgrim: thus do you plead; "Truth it is, Lord, thy grace is absolutely free; there was neither wit nor wealth to move thee to do what thou hast done; I can remember the time when I was as sorry and silly a creature as was in all the country; there was no capacity in me to do thee any remarkable service; thou didst not set thy love upon me for any natural or moral accomplishments; even so, Father, because it pleased thee: and wilt thou now forsake me; thou mightest have done that at easier rates."

8. Here is Jacob's stone of memorial for by-past and present mercies; *Now*, saith he, *I am become two bands, i. e.* two great companies of wives, children, servants, flocks, herds; I may say, These, where had they been? It is strange to see poor worm Jacob thus rich; oh the bounty of God! So do thou say, "Lord, take notice what thou hast done for me; must all this be in vain? Wilt thou throw away these good things? Wilt thou not rather crown these gifts with continuance of thy kindness? wilt thou return to do me hurt, after thou hast done me all this good? Dost thou not remember my convictions, consolations; my fears, tears, doubtings, refreshments? Oh the passages of love betwixt thee and me! Shall I be the grave of these mercies? Lord forget me not."

9. Here is his sense of approaching danger, *Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother—for I fear him, &c.* A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city. Jacob's danger was a spur to his prayer. A pursued hart runs fast for shelter; so do thou, soul, when afraid; fly to the Lord, and say, "Oh, my God, I have deadly enemies, within and without; my case is forlorn, desperate; I have none to run to, but thyself: hast not thou said, that *in thee the fatherless find mercy?* Other refuge fails me; no man cares for my soul: Lord, relieve, deliver this sinful wretch, else I go down into the pit."

10. Once more doth Jacob plead the promise, and enlarge the granted charter: *Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea:* thus do you; still seek out, suck  
sweetness

sweetness from, and put in suit the promises by earnest prayer : In this manner ; “ Lord, hast thou not promised an heart of flesh, a broken heart ? Why then is my heart hardened from thy fear ? Dost thou not say, thou wilt give thy holy Spirit to them that ask it ? This, Lord, I want, to be a Spirit of truth and illumination, a Spirit of prayer and supplication, a Spirit of grace and sanctification, and of satisfaction : oh bestow this mercy upon me : dost thou not promise to take away my iniquities by pardoning grace, for thine own name’s sake ? and to subdue my corruption, and increase grace, and bring me to glory ? Lord, remember thy word unto thy servant, in which thou hast caused me to trust.”

Thus much for helps in pleading with God, and for that use of instruction.

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## CHAP. VIII. SECT. I.

### *An Use of Exhortation urged.*

THE last use is for exhortation, to put us on to the performance of this sweet duty of closet-prayer. My beloved friends, I beseech you suffer the word of exhortation ; you see the work before you ; you see a plain Scripture-warrant for it ; you have heard many instances of Scripture-patterns ; you see the manner of the performance ; let none now plead ignorance, or look upon it as needless, or make excuses or evasions. Is it not equal and reasonable ? Is it not worth the while to converse with your God

in a corner? Look over the reasons of the doctrine, and see if there be not some weight in them.

But, besides those, I shall propound to you these exhortatory motives.

1. Would you not be such as make conscience of every commanded duty? You are no real saints, unless you have respect to all God's commandments, Psal. cxix. 6. If you pick and choose in your obedience, you are hollow-hearted hypocrites: and can you deny this to be a duty? and will you stand dodging with God? Must he raze this sentence out of the Bible, to humour your conceits and sloth? Is not closet-prayer a Christian duty? Dare you argue against it? Out of what topics will you fetch your arguments? And do you acknowledge it to be a duty, and will not practise it? Your own mouths will condemn you? what needs any more witnesses? But if you be real saints, I dare say you do approve of it, and practise it sometimes; and why are you not constant in your obedience? Is it not the property of a saint to do righteousness at all times? Psal. cvi. 3. Oh consider this, and do not either neglect a command, or omit this known duty.

2. Would you not have the truth of grace cleared up in your souls? Surely there is no Christian but would arrive at assurance; and this is one way to evidence sincerity, being much with God in secret duty: as he grieves truly that grieves without witness; so those religious actings are most evidential of grace that are least obvious to the view of men; and whereby a Christian approves his heart only to the heart searching God,  
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Rom: ii. 28. Here is the true Israelite, that can, with Jacob, converse with God alone, and seeks his praise not of men, but of God. Observe it, a Christian ordinarily hath not that comfort in a duty exposed to others view, which he hath in that he performs betwixt God and his own soul: for there is most danger of selfishness in the former, and more self-denial in the latter. The wind of applause may blow men far in a creditable performance; but humility and sincerity is most evident in secret appeals to God. Consider this, Christians, you run to sermons, ministers, good books, and take much pains to try your state, by marks and signs; make trial of this more compendious course, to clear your state; be much with God in closet-prayer.

3. Would you not be found in the practice of the power of godliness? Oh then fall close to closet-prayer. Alas! Sirs, hearing sermons, reading Scriptures, discoursing religiously, praying in the family, may be done only for fashion sake; and the person that doth them, may have no more than the form of godliness: mistake me not; I do not condemn the practice of these, nor them that do them, as formalists for that; God forbid; they are Scripture duties; but the outward part of these may be done without the power of godliness; but to struggle with a man's own heart, to wrestle with God in a corner, to meditate and give up a man's self to these duties, as in the presence of God; oh, this shews something of the power of grace, and life of holiness. This is heart-work, and that is hard work, costly duties, spiritual exercises, which is more than to offer God thousands of rams, or a first-

first-born son. David would not offer that to God that cost him nothing; and shall we be content with the ordinary duties which may be consistent with an easy plodding formality?

4. Would you not have your hearts eased under pressing burdens? Are you in love with your sorrows? would you not be rid of them? Behold, I shew unto you an excellent way to get ease, which is, a recourse to God in secret prayer. I have heard some precious Christians say, that when any thing hath lain upon their hearts, ready to overwhelm them, they have run to God in a corner, and there have left their load, and thence have gone, with good Hannah, and have been no more sad. And experience tells us, that when any pressing affliction lies upon us, if we can unbosom ourselves to an intimate friend, though not a word of counsel or comfort pass from him; yet that opening of our hearts doth ease, as vomiting doth an oppressed stomach. And hence saith Job, *I will speak that I may be refreshed.* And Scripture backs this, in Phil. iv. 6. *Be careful in nothing, but in every thing make your requests known to God,* and unload your cares and fears into the bosom of God. But how? Why, by prayer and supplication in thanksgiving. Lay your load on God by prayer, and he will bear it.

5. Would you not obtain boldness in access to God, and familiarity with him? Oh, go often to God in closet-prayer. Princes take more state upon them when conversing with their favourites before others, but when none are present, they open their hearts more familiarly to them. I know Abraham, saith God, he and I are well

acquainted, he is my friend, he visits me often, and *shall I hide any thing from Abraham?* I will take him to a side, and tell him my whole heart: so will God to you, he will communicate much to you, and you may say any thing to him; you are not strangers to him, but may come into his presence boldly, and he will make you welcome, Heb. iv. 16. On the contrary, what a dreadful thing will it be to have strange thoughts of God in duty, or at death? Strangeness betwixt God and a soul is a sad uncomfortable thing: wicked men are total strangers to God; gracious souls, little employed in secret prayer, are little acquainted with God, and worship afar off; but sincere souls, conversing much with God in secret, attain to abundance of intimacy with the Lord; and is not that a mercy worth a world?

6. Would you not have the sins of others to bring wrath and judgment on the place? Oh then let your souls weep and pray in secret places, as Jeremiah did, chap. xiii. 17. This is the last and safest way to be delivered from the guilt of open crying sins in the land, even a mourning for them in prayer before the Lord; thus did Lot, and David, Paul, and all saints: yea, Moses's solitary prayer interposed betwixt flaming wrath and offending Israel: thus did he stand in the gap, and you make an atonement for the nation. A gift in secret may pacify that wrath that is already broken out against us. Wicked men sin in secret; let us mourn in secret; yea, they sin openly, let us lament privately, 2 Kings, xvii. 9. The truth is, secret sins may undo a nation, except the cry of the saints secret prayers be louder than the cry of wicked men's secret sins:

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Oh fall to it. *Arise; cry out in the night, in the beginning of the watches; pour out thine heart before the face of the Lord,* Lam. ii. 19.

7. Would you not have your own secret sins set in the light of God's countenance? Psal. xc. 8. then repent and pray alone; humble your souls in secret for your secret sins. Are you not conscious to yourselves of much secret guilt? And doth not God expect that you should set yourselves to mourn over them, and cry to God for pardoning grace in secret? Do you not know that God will bring every secret thing to light in the great day of accounts? Eccl. xii. 13. Nay, God may punish you openly, as he did David for his secret sin, 2 Sam. xii. 12. Well, then, anticipate that sad severe judgment, by judging yourselves, and deprecating his righteous judgment. I may say to thee, soul, as Solomon bespeaks Shimei, Thou knowest all the wickedness which thy heart is privy to: and where are thy prayers, and tears, and groanings in secret? Oh, sirs, if others sins draw you not to secret prayer, let your own, which may afford matter of abundant grief in your closets and retirement.

8. Would you prevent and circumvent wicked men's secret plots? Be sure, then, you undermine them by secret prayer. *Wicked men lie in wait secretly, as a lion in his den, to catch the poor, and murder the innocent,* Psal. x. 8, 9. Psal. lxiv. 1, 2. 4, 5. And now what course is to be taken, for preventing these horrid designs? Alas! we have no other remedy, but the ancient Christians weapons, prayers, and tears; these may break their nets, and blunt their weapons. Good Jeremiah knew not that they had devised devices against



against him; but he reveals his cause to God in prayer; and then God shews him their doings, and prevents their attempts, Jer. xi. 18, 19, 20. Saints closet-prayers may break wicked men's closet-plots: fall close, then, to this great duty.

9. Would you not be condemned by the heathens chamber-idolatry? Oh then do you perform chamber and closet duties: they had their household gods, and closet images; they had their covered, vailed, and mysterious exercises in secret places: and the Jews borrowed several mystical rites of the Heathens. Hence we read, in Ezek. viii. 12. of chambers of imagery, as the Papists at this day have their crucifixes, their petty-chamber, closet-deities, where they drop their beads, and do homage to their idols. And shall these, in their blind superstition, condemn our irreligion? Shall it be said of a devout philosopher, that in so many years he spoke more with the gods than with men? And shall it be said of any of us, that God (even the true God) is not in all our thoughts? or so little in our lips, at least in secret solemn addressees to him? Let not poor ignorant Papists out-strip us in devotion, since there is such vast difference.

10. Would you not be suitable to God's dispensations? When the Lord our God puts us to silence, and into solitary places, he expects that we should visit him there: Cant. ii. 14. *Oh my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret place of the stairs, i. e. in an afflicted, persecuted, and desolate condition; Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, i. e. in the duties of prayer, praise, and gospel ordinances: For then was her voice sweet, and countenance comely; when they are*  
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cast out, then doth God expect and entertain them: and this advantage have God's children had by privacy, into which they were cast, as we heard before of Jeremiah, chap. xv. 15. So the afflicted church, Lam. iii. 28, 29. When she sitteth alone in solitariness, then she putteth her mouth in the dust, in fasting and prayer; and so a particular person, as there: now a man is at leisure for it: while persons have their full employment or enjoyments, they are too busy; but when persons are taken off other ways, it is time to retire themselves, and retreat to God. The less comfort persons find in public ordinances, the more serious must they be in closet performances, that the loss may be supplied some way.

## S E C T. II.

### *Several Objections answered.*

**I**T is strange if our carnal hearts and cavilling spirits have not something to say against this difficult duty: I shall therefore mention what objections I can foresee may be made, and briefly answer them.

1. *Obj.* We pray in our families, and is not that enough? What needs all this ado?

*Answ.* 1. This objection cannot be made by all: some have no families to pray with; but if thou dost pray in thy family, it is well; there is many graceless heads and prayerless houses: of which it may be said, The fear of God is not in this place: oh the wrath that shall be poured out on such families! But suppose thou dost, family-prayer is one thing, and closet-prayer is another: and let me tell thee, God never made one

one duty to supersede another; you must not juggle out one work, because you are bound to perform another. Every thing is beautiful in its place and season. God's commandments are exceeding broad, and take in a great compass of duties. You must worship God in your houses; that exempts you not from worshipping God in your closets, no more than in the public assemblies: there is equal commands for all, necessity of all; neglect any at your peril: besides, I told you, a child of God hath a secret errand to his Father, that it is not fit his family should know of; and upon this account God hath appointed closet-prayer, as tendering the credit of his people, that they might not discover their spiritual nakedness to any but to that God who knows their secrets, and will keep their counsel: and I must tell thee, soul, thou art very little sensible of thy spiritual state or wants, if thou have nothing to say to God that thou wouldst not have others to hear.

2. *Obj.* But I am a poor man, and busy in my calling, and cannot take so much time in closet-prayer; I have other occasions.

*Ans.* Friend, hast thou any greater business than the affairs of thy soul; let thy calling stand still, rather than thy soul should be damned: cursed be those occasions that eat out religion: but consider, you may follow both callings, if you be observant; our general and particular callings must not interfere. Clean creatures divided the hoof; considerate Christians are such as rightly proportion works to their particular seasons. A chief part of David's arithmetic of numbering days, was in that which we call di-

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vision, to cast the account of this our short life, so as to divide the little total sum thereof into the several portions of time due for performing every duty in: the hand-maid may not thrust out the mistress; nor the shop have all, and chamber none of our time. You are flat Atheists, if you think praying will hinder your work: No, no, it blesteth and expediteth temporal affairs. We use to say, "Meat and mattins hinder no work." Canst thou not get time for eating, sleeping? Yea, dost thou not spend as much time in idleness and vain discourse, as would be required every day for this duty? If thou hadst an honest heart, thou wouldst redeem time from thy meat, or sleep, or recreations, for prayer, rather than neglect a duty, or damn thy soul: the truth is, we complain we want time, but we waste time: there is not the poorest labourer but he mispends more time than prayer-time comes to: and why should any water be left off, when there is little enough in the channel to turn the mill for or towards our God?

3. *Obj.* But I am a servant, and must obey my master; I am kept too hardly at work to get time for secret-prayer; I am called to work betimes, dogged to it all the day.

*Ans.* Though you be servants to do men's work, yet not slaves to their lusts; in that respect you must not be the servants of men; if you be servants, you are the Lord's free-men; if free, yet you are Christ's servants, 1 Cor. vii. 22, 23. Remember, you have a master in heaven; no mortal creature can discharge you from your attendance on God: you must do God's work, as well as your master's, and your  
master's



master's work for God's sake, Eph. vi. 6, 7. Oh, Sirs, do not neglect your duty to God, to pleasure men. Can your superior answer for your neglect? Or interpose betwixt flaming wrath and your sinning souls? But I am afraid some lay the blame on masters, when the fault is in themselves: deceive not thyself by accusing others to clear thyself; this was Adam's fault. Think not that another's rigour can excuse thy neglect. Let me tell you, there is never a servant so strictly watched, but might steal some time from his master for his God, and yet do him no wrong: only see that you be prudent in choosing such seasons as may not justly provoke your master, or prejudice his occasions: and be often in your callings, lifting up your hearts to God; be content with your condition; had you more liberty, it may be your hearts would not be in so good a frame. But let me bespeak masters indulgence to poor and pious servants. Oh hinder them not in any good work; rather put them upon it, encourage them in it, bless God that you have praying servants; this is a hopeful preface of good success: let not your servants fare the worse, but the better for being God's servants.

4. *Obj.* But I have no closet to pray in, no convenient room for secret prayer; I have a little house, a busy full family, and cannot retire myself.

*Ans.* A good heart will find room, either within doors, or without; a gracious soul will seek out places to pray in; any sorry cot will be a Bethel, where it can enjoy its God; or, if he cannot get to it under the roof, he will (with good Isaac) walk out into the fields to meditate

and to pray: could heathens and idolatrous Jews plant groves for their superstition, in an apish imitation of Abraham's practice? And cannot a bird of paradise take its flight out of some wood or arbour into heaven? but most need not make this silly flight excuse; they have good roofs to be in, and need not worship God in the open air: few of us but we have convenient rooms; but most of us want affectionate hearts to visit God therein: but, Christians, make good use of your houses to serve God therein, else they may justly spew you out, and leave you harbourless; and then what a dreadful sting and guilt will follow you whithersoever you go? Oh consider London's flames and ruins; your houses are no better built, nor more secured from the like catastrophe; do not weaken their foundations by wilful neglects, or scandalous sins.

5. *Obj.* But I know some good Christians that never use it, yea, that maintain it in their judgments that it is not necessary, except in some extraordinary cases; what say you to that?

*Ans.* I never yet met with such persons that had the face of religion, that ever spoke against the ordinary practice of this duty of closet-prayer. I confess, I have met with some, who being urged to family-prayer, have put it off with this evasion, that they would pray in their closets (how well, the God of heaven knows), but if any professor's judgment be so far bribed to plead for the flesh in this neglect, the Lord rebuke them, and forgive them; they know not what they say. This is a lamentation, that there is scarce any truth so sacred, or duty so spiritual, but it hath been contradicted

contradicted in these licentious days. Some have pleaded against family-prayer, catechising, christian meetings, and what not; but they can produce no solid arguments: do not you follow their example, contrary to plain Scripture precepts and precedents. Many were produced for confirmation, most whereof were not only in extraordinary cases, but were an ordinary practice: and can you find the day that affords not some special matter to occasion you to make addresses to God in secret prayer? If you be sensible and observant, surely you will see great need for such retirements in ordinary practice: remember this, that you follow no man, but as he follows Christ; but I am sure our precious Saviour used this practice.

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### S E C T. III.

#### *More Objections answered.*

6. *Obj.* **B**UT I find not my heart affected or prepared: is it not a tempting of God, to go when the Spirit doth not move me?

*Answ.* It is a dangerous mistake, to think you may not go to duty but when the Spirit moves you: for it may be long before it stir; the Spirit bloweth where and when it listeth: you are therefore to lay yourselves in the way of the Spirit, call in its aid, which ordinarily comes when souls do their duty: holy performances are (as it were) the walk of the Spirit, the air where he breathes: and be sure he is most likely to be found in his own way and walk; but you can-

not expect him in the neglect of plain duty: try this way, put God to it, plead his promise; you cannot think to be warm, if you run from the fire: if you have not an appetite to pray, you must pray for an appetite; for neglect, or omission of a duty, never fits, but always unfits for a duty: if you will heed your trifling spirits, and accept every excuse which they make, you shall never pray: if you play the truant one time, you will have less mind to go to God the next time; guilt makes you afraid, and you dare not come near that God whom you have wronged; as Adam ran from God, and Peter would thrust Christ from him, when conscious of guilt. How dare you look God in the face, whom you have slighted? Besides, you will find that neglect of duty doth not make the next performance more easy, but more difficult. It will (as one saith) require more time and pains for you to tune your instrument, than for another to play his lesson: and is it not more likely God should come to you in pains-taking, than total omission? Do you not read in the Psalms, how often David begun faintly, and ended triumphantly? Try the Lord, and see if he be not better than you expect.

7. *Obj.* Aye, but (saith a poor soul) I meet with temptations when I go to God in secret; Satan assaults me, I am timorous, and dare not be alone, or in the dark, but am affrighted.

*Answ.* It is a sign the duty is good, because so bad a spirit opposeth it: the more Satan sees a duty is for the soul's advantage, the more diligent he is to hinder the performance; but must Satan be gratified, rather than God glorified, or  
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thy soul edified? Wilt thou give way to him? *Resist the devil, and he will flee from thee*; think not thou canst perform a flesh displeasing duty, when Satan is quiet, and doth not molest; he will be busy to tempt, when thou art going to thy God. This is no new thing; he will jog thy hand, when thou art writing thy letter to thy Friend in heaven. Think not to be more exempted, than even thy Saviour himself; he was set upon (by the devil) in his solitary recesses in the wilderness: and oh the horrible nature of those temptations! Matt. iv. When Joshua the high-priest prayed, *Satan stood at his right-hand to resist him*; but the issue was good, *God rebuked him*, Zech. iii. 1, 2. And thus he will do for thee; he will tread Satan under thy feet, and make thee a conqueror; only when thou art annoyed with this foul spirit, turn to thy God; leave not thy work; let not Satan take thee off duty; then he hath attained his end: fall closer to the work; consider, fasting and prayer cast out the devil; watching and prayer are preservatives from infection; yea, prayer itself is a chief piece of a Christian's armour, Eph. vi. 18. If you be beat off this, you are routed; this engageth God for you: without this, you are but like other men; and the Philistines will put out your eyes, lead you captive, and make sport of you: stick close to this whatever you do; though all the devils in hell roar upon you, yet run to your God in prayer; they are sluggards (or cowards), that say there is a lion in the way, when they are called out to hard service, or difficult duty; nay, rather say, as he once in an arduous undertaking, Here is a work fit for the spirit

spirit of an Alexander; so here is a duty that becomes a Christian to manage: by your God, *you may run through a troop, and leap over a wall.* But more of that anon.

8. *Obj.* But I get no good by closet-prayer; I have used it so long; and still my heart is as cold, hard, dead, as ever; I will give over now.

*Ans.* Is not this too like the language of those that say, *It is in vain to serve God?* Mal. iii. 14. And are you like those Atheists, that think prayer is to no purpose? I hope not. You think it doth good to some, but not to you. Well, what is the reason? Is it not because you do not pray aright? Therefore search yourselves, see how you prayed, mourn over your defects, and mend the matter: it is true, one who sees the well dry, breaks or throws away his pitcher. But is God a barren wilderness? Is it not good for you to draw near to God? Were they ever ashamed that waited on him? Hast not thou sometimes found benefit by secret prayer? *God is good to the soul that seeks him:* Try again, you will not loose your labour; be not weary of well doing; in due time you shall reap, if you faint not; let not your hands hang down, let not your knees grow feeble; the text tells you, *Your Father that sees in secret will reward you openly*; and dare you not trust him beyond sense and experience? There may be more advantage by this duty, than you are aware of; you shall not yet know the profit you have by secret prayer; you must keep on in a patient continuance in well-doing, and not give over till you receive a full reward: but, oh take heed of giving over prayer, because you think you want present profit: you cannot do

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Satan greater service, or your souls more prejudice. But more of this anon.

9. *Obj.* But I am weak in parts, and know not what to say ; fain I would, but, alas ! I cannot open my wants to God in prayer ; I want gifts, abilities.

*Answ.* I am glad to hear thee thus complain : thou art fitter for praying, when thou canst lie under the sense of thy inability to pray ; that is an useful disposition in duty : but thou sayest thou canst not pray ; then I will tell thee what to do : go thy ways alone, and fall down upon thy knees, and plainly tell the Lord thou canst not pray, and intreat him to help thee by his blessed Spirit, which he hath promised to them that ask it : tell the Lord, that thou canst not think a good thought, or speak a good word without that blessed Spirit ; but it shall help thine infirmities, and teach thee what to say : oh beg hard for that holy Spirit, and then let some means be used to get matter of prayer : you know it consists of confession of sin, petition for good things, deprecation of evil, and thanksgiving for mercies : well, then, sit down, and think with thyself, what sins thou art guilty of ; original or actual ; of omission or commission ; this is too too fruitful a subject : take them home, tell God of them by ingenuous confession. Then be-think thyself what thou wantest at the hands of God ; as, pardon, grace, peace, heaven, and beg these : consider also, what thou art afraid of, as guilt, strength, effects of sin, God's wrath, Satan's malice ; and desire the Lord to prevent and remove these, for Christ's sake. And, lastly, recollect what mercies thou hast had from God,  
and

and reckon them up to God, with expressions of thankfulness. Do this with plainness, and seriousness; heed not so much for exact method, or fine phrases; the gilt of the key makes it not open the door a jot the better; and a prayer doth not work upon God the rather because of the neat language therein; but unbosom thyself plainly and seriously before thy God, and thou shalt find present assistance and acceptance, and future enlargement and encouragement: be honest, though never so homely in prayer.

10. *Obj.* But I like not this stir, it is a hard and difficult work; I would rather do any thing than this, my spirit is wonderful averse to it; say what you will, it will not down with me, to make all this ado in closet-prayer; it is pretty fair if I can keep up such duties as church and family require.

*Ans.* This is the pleading of flesh and blood; this is the bottom of the former objections; I expected this all along: if the tongue speak not thus, the heart doth. Let a duty be pressed never so home, a carnal heart will make some evasions; though the mouth be stopped, yet a cavilling heart will have something to say against a spiritual duty: and if it cannot be mad with reason, it grows mad without reason, and against Scripture. It is easier to bring arguments to convince the judgment, than to draw the will and affections to a thorough obedience: but, soul, wilt thou plead for Baal? Wilt thou take the devil's part, and yield to carnal reason? or wilt thou baulk any divine commands to gratify a lazy humour, or a base lust? God forbid. Methinks, if thou canst not obey as thou oughtest,

yet



yet thou shouldst take God's part, and plead for obedience ; Paul doth so, Rom. vii. 15, 16. Though he saith, *What I would, that I do not ; but what I hate, that do I*—yet (saith he) *I consent to the law that it is good ; i. e.* I take part with God, and join with God's will against my corrupt and carnal affections, that would draw my neck from under this heavenly yoke : and if you have not something within you that takes part with God's revealed will, you are not of God : but a principle of grace doth facilitate and make easy the hardest duties, because there is a likeness betwixt holy hearts and holy performances. Love makes every thing easy ; hence it comes to pass that Christ's yoke is easy, Mat. xi. 30. his ways pleasant, and his commandments not grievous, 1 John, v. 3. If thy heart were right, duties would be sweet to thy soul ; it is no burden to eat, drink, sleep ; the acts of nature are delightful to persons in a right temper ; if they be not, nature is oppressed, and out of order : a child of God in duty, so far as regenerated, is like a man in his calling, or a creature in its proper element : besides, wert thou more accustomed to duty in secret, it would be more familiar to thee, and less irksome : we see, by experience, use makes heavy things light ; we hardly feel the weight of our cloaths, because fitted to us, and constantly carried by us ; whenas the same weight upon our shoulders would trouble us : Christians, consider, all Christian duties are not of equal difficulty ; yet withal observe it, duties that are hardest to go through, many times bring in the sweetest income : and so is this ; the profit of it will abundantly recompence for your pains

pains in it: be sure when a duty is lined with difficulty, and your corrupt hearts draw back, and have most averſeneſs to it, there is ſomething of God in that duty, and God aims you more than ordinary advantage by it: therefore do not ſay a word againſt it, but ſtir up yourſelves, ſpur on your hearts, ſhake off ſloth, and run to God, whatever Satan, the world, or fleſh ſay to the contrary: thus much for the objections.

## S E C T. V.

*Some Caſes of Conſcience briefly answered.*

**T**HERE are yet four caſes of conſcience I ſhall briefly propound and answer.

1. *Caſe.* Whether may not an hypocrite or graceleſs ſoul perform this duty of cloſet-prayer; and what difference is there betwixt a real ſaint and an unregenerate perſon in this work?

1. *Anſ.* It is poſſible a carnal man may pray in ſecret, but with theſe differences: 1. He is urged to it by the challenges of an accusing conſcience, he is (as it were) dogged to it, he dare not but do it; but a child of God hath a gracious principle, inclining him to it, from love to God, and a deſire to pleaſe and enjoy him: yet through the remainders of corruption, there is much unwillingneſs in the beſt; ſo that ſometimes a ſaint muſt even force himſelf to the performance.

2. An hypocrite will not thus pray always, John, xxvii. 9, 10. It is but in ſome pang, or under ſome preſſing affliction; and when this good mood is over, he takes his leave of God,  
till

till whipt to him again by the like : but a child of God is in some measure constant and diligent in the duty, though he may have sinful omissions and intermissions, yet never a total cessation from duty. Grace works the heart God-ward, and the soul is not content without him.

3. An hypocrite doth not make conscience to get his heart up to God in the duty ; he is content with the work done, words said ; but a real saint hath most ado with his heart ; that is the hardest piece of the work ; he dare not leave that behind him, and he hath much ado to get it up.

4. A carnal man keeps his round in formal duty, but gets nothing ; he prays to little profit or purpose ; and (indeed) doth not much study to gain a spiritual good. But a child of God, is a great gainer ; he gets (at some times) communion with God, communications from God : oh what good doth his soul meet with ! though not always, yet at sometimes.

2. *Case.* Whether may a Christian bind himself to the performance of this duty of closet-prayer at stated times ? Or, suppose a Christian miss his times designed for that work, what must he then do ?

*Ans.* To the former ; that in general, thou mayest and must swear and vow, that thou wilt keep God's commandments, Psal. cxix. 106. So doth David. And (in Scripture) we are bid to make vows, and pay them to the Lord, Psal. lxxvi. 11. Vowing ourselves and all that we have to God, is necessary : sequestering some part of our time to his service, is requisite : and in some cases, for some persons, it may be expedient

cient to bind and task ourselves, by an holy resolution, to take so much time at least every day for God's worship, yea, at such a time as may be judged most commodious by our experiences. And this may be a good help to keep in our treacherous hearts from delay or dallying: but to engage ourselves to a particular hour so punctually, and unalterably, as not to take another, may not be so safe; partly, because our times are in God's hands, and we know not what intervening providence may fall in to prevent our performance, whereby conscience may be entangled in a perplexing labyrinth; besides, our outward occasions, and the frame of our spirits, may discover a greater fitness at another season: yet though I would not have Christians bring a snare upon their souls by vowing, yet I humbly conceive that they may consult conveniences and designs some time for that work and purpose, God willing, to keep an hour of prayer: and if they be hindered by a journey, or any unexpected unavoidable occasions, they must mourn for it as their burden, redouble their diligence another time, not plead needless diversions, lift up ejaculations to God, keep a praying frame of spirit, and God will graciously pardon and entertain them.

3. *Case.* How may a Christian know that he enjoyeth communion with God in closet-prayer?

*Ans.* Communion with God is twofold. 1. As to graces; 2. As to comforts. Sometimes a Christian may feel the joy of God's salvation, have the sweet kisses of his mouth, smiles of his face, seals of his Spirit, and the lively springings of joy and ravishing pleasures; these carry their own

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own evidence along with them: but all have not these, nor any at all times; therefore the surest way is to enquire after communion with God, with reference to the exercise of grace in duty: then hath a child of God true fellowship with God, when by the sweet assistance of God's Spirit his mind is knit to the object of worship, the understanding is fruitful in spiritual and suitable thoughts, when the will and affections are carried out in strong and panting desires and longings after God: when the heart is thoroughly broken in the sense of sin, melted into sorrow, affected with the sweetness of pardoning grace, and ardently pleads with God for acceptance: again, when the graces of the Spirit are acted in the duty, as, an holy awe and fear of God, faith, love, humility, zeal, and fervency, and a willingness to forgive others, as well as to be forgiven by the Lord: lastly, a soul may know when it hath communion with God, by the consequences of duty, as when the Christian is more vile in his own eyes, as Abraham was, gives God all the glory, sees and bewails his defects in greatest enlargements, when the spirit is left in a better frame, and fitter to bear crosses, and perform after duties, &c. I do but hint these things.

4. *Case.* Suppose I have prayed and prayed, and find not my heart affected; it is dead, dull, distracted, I do no good, get no good in duty; I fear I offend God: what shall I do?

*Ans.* Such a case is sad: yet consider, 1. It may be the case of gracious hearts; David was so depressed and troubled, that he could not speak, Psal. lxxvii. 3, 4. God's best children  
are

are sometimes out of frame, their spirits unfit for duty.

2. A total neglect will not mend the matter, nor help the frame of your hearts; one sin will never cure another; running from the fire is not the way to be warm: your hearts will not be better, but worse, by forbearance: omission indisposeth.

3. Who knows but God may come in the next time? Keep upon the Royal Exchange; still ply the oars; give God no rest; gratify not Satan by neglect. Tradesmen keep their markets, though for small gains: you will get something at last worth your pains; they never were ashamed that have waited on him: the issue will be good.

4. God may graciously accept thy obedience, though thou have not sweet enlargement; the obedience is thine, the enlargement God's; he is a free agent, and works when he pleaseth; he loves to see poor souls tug and struggle with their own hearts; though they can get little forward, yet they would be better, and do better: the father takes it well, when the child is striving to obey him, though it fall very far short: he sees the spirit is willing, though the flesh be weak, and accepts of upright endeavours: nay, observe it, a Christian's conscientious attendance upon God, without enlargements, may be more acceptable to God, than when he hath the sweetest enlargement; because there is most obedience in those duties; but in the other, a Christian is (as it were) hired to performances, by the earnest-penny of enlargements: oh, it is a brave thing to persevere (in duty) under discouragements: he that can trade when times are so dead,

dead, that all his wares lie upon his hand, yet trades more; surely his stock is great. So it is an evidence of much faith, love, sincerity, when the soul can maintain this heavenly trade, when his sensible incomes are small: yet, when God thus withdraws from you, you must deeply lay it to heart, enquire the cause, make your peace with him, and ply the throne of grace with greater importunity. Thus much briefly, for these cases of conscience.

And now, beloved friends, I have dispatched this subject concerning closet-prayer: what remains, but that we should all fall close to the constant practice of this duty? What do ministers preach sermons, or print books for? Is it to be seen and heard in public? Is it to be applauded? Or, is it not rather to do good to people's souls? And can people get any good by hearing a sound of words, or a complemental reading what is written? Is there not something else required of you now, even a setting about the conscientious practice of what is before you? What say you, sirs, to this point; is closet-prayer a Christian duty, or is it not? If it be not, why doth Christ direct us to the right manner of performance, and assure us that our Father will reward it openly? Will God reward any thing but commanded duty? There is no question but it is a duty; I challenge any man to disprove it now, and to stand to his assertion another day before the God of heaven: but I think none will deny it to be a duty; and, sirs, dare any man that professeth religion, live in the gross neglect of plain duty? Do you think it is fit it should be done, and will you not do

it? Shall your own tongues be brought in as witnesses against yourselves? Will you be like that son that said, I go, sir, but went not? Shall God wait your leisure, and you will not give him a visit? Will you go into your closets to make up your accounts, and will you not reckon straight betwixt God and your souls? Dare you go from day to day under the guilt of a known sin? If you do not what you have read, this book will fly in the face of conscience another day. But I am most afraid, lest Christians trifle about this work, and shuffle it off after any fashion, and so put off God with a meer outside performance, to pacify conscience, without that warmth and life we should have in our closets: it is recorded of Luther, that he prayed every day three hours, and even then when his spirits were most lively; nor were his closet-prayers dull, careless, heartless, but so fervent and ardent, saith Melancton, that they which stood under his window, where he stood praying, might see his tears falling and dropping down: oh, but where is this zeal and ardency in our secret devotion? Are we not ready to drop asleep, even upon our knees? Alas, how formal are we? the fire of God is wanting in our sacrifices: nay, do we not take God's name in vain many times, and know not what we say? Oh, why do we thus forget God's omnipresence and omniscience? Doth not he know our hearts? And should not we approve ourselves to God in our closets? Yea, doth not Satan stand under our closet-window (or rather, at our elbow) and hears what we say to God in our closets? If you take no notice of your mistakes in closet-prayer, Satan doth, and takes  
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advantage by them: indeed, I have heard some make this a scruple, whether they should in secret confess heart-sins, lest Satan should be acquainted with what he knew not before, and so be furnished with matter to accuse them of; but an ingenuous confession prevents Satan's accusation, because we have a promise of remission annexed thereunto, Rom. viii. 33. *And who shall lay any thing to the charge of justified persons?* He hath little reason to take your confessions, and dash them in your teeth; since that was both the means and evidence of pardon: but if you fear that, you may do as Hannah, in prayer; speak in your hearts, and then Satan cannot tell what you say, but your God doth: however, neglect not the duty; for this you may be sure, that Satan will catch more advantage by omission, or negligent performance, than by an ingenuous acknowledgement of heart-sins, though he do hear you.

Sirs, awake to righteousness; rouse up yourselves to this work; put not off God (or conscience) with a negative answer: you may as well say, Nay, as pretend and promise to do it, and not perform; fall to the practice of it therefore this day; there is danger in delays; if you do it not to-day, you will be more unfit to-morrow: at this instant fall upon thy knees, beg a blessing upon this book for the good of thy soul and others; look upon closet-prayer as thy privilege, as well as thy duty: it is a mercy thou mayest go to God as often as thou wilt, and for what thou needest: it is no small favour that God hath allowed thee the use of this privy key  
to

to open Heaven-gates when thou hast not the more public key of others help in prayer; yet this is thy encouragement, *thy Father that sees in secret will reward thee openly.*

I shall shut up all with a piece of Herbert's poetry, called, Artillery.

**A**S I one evening sate before my cell,  
Methought a star did shoot into my lap;  
I rose and shook my cloaths, as knowing well,  
That from small fires, comes oft no small mishap:  
When suddenly I heard one say,  
Do as thou usest, disobey,  
Expel good motions from thy breast,  
Which have the face of fire, but end in rest.

I, who had heard of music in the spheres,  
But not of speech in stars, began to muse;  
But turning to my God, whose ministers  
The stars and all things are; if I refuse,  
Dread Lord, said I, so oft my good,  
Then I refuse not even with blood,  
To wash away my stubborn thought:  
For I will do, or suffer what I ought.

But I have also stars and shooters too,  
Born where thy servants both artilleries use;  
My tears and prayers night and day do woo,  
And work up to thee, yet thou dost refuse:  
Not but I am (I must say still)  
Much more oblig'd to do thy will,  
Than thou to grant mine; but because  
Thy promise now hath even set thee thy laws:

Then

Then we are shooters both; and thou dost deign  
To enter combat with us, and contest.

With thine own clay: but I would parly fain;  
Shun not my arrows, and behold my breast:

Yet if thou shunnest, I am thine:

I must be so, if I am mine.

There is no articuling with thee:  
I am but finite, yet thine infinitely.

F I N I S.

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